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October, 2020

COVID-19: Keeping people we support safe

Dear Family Member,

I am writing to keep you updated on our planning for the winter period, ensuring that we keep our services safe. Our teams have done an exceptional job through a very long and often hot summer in maintaining infection control so that even at it's peak, less than 1 percent of people we support were symptomatic. Whilst each and every case of Covid, or of symptoms is incredibly worrying, I have been very proud of the dedication and care that our teams have shown at all levels of the organisation. They have frequently gone above and beyond, and through the regular welfare calls and service manager calls that we hold, as well as through their vigilance and attention to every detail, they have been fundamental in tackling this pandemic.

As you will no doubt have been carefully following in the news, the transmission rate of COVID-19 is increasing and likely to pose a significant risk nationally over the course of the winter. While we would have hoped by now to be easing restrictions, we are at the very least maintaining the same restrictions we have had in place in the past few months. Indeed, depending on local infection rates, we have needed in some areas to increase restrictions if advised to by the local Director of Public Health.

We are acutely aware of the impact of more restricted family contact the pandemic has had for people we support, as well as reduced social opportunities. Over the course of the pandemic we have been working hard with our support teams to ensure active engagement with families to maximise the potential for flexible means of contact and communication. Additionally, we continue to offer ideas and inspirational activities to keep people meaningfully occupied (through our Health & Wellbeing Team).

However, of course many people find the lack of close contact with their families and loss of routine or regular visits very difficult. We have endeavoured to maintain a flexible and personalised approach to support people with family contact, as much as we are able to within the government guidance and balancing risk of transmission in a home, with supporting the physical and psychological wellbeing of each person supported.

Our COVID-19 Business Continuity Plan is on the website and has recently been updated for winter. In addition, we have updated our [Visitor Policy](#) in light of recent guidance



changes, you can find it [here](#). The updated guidance while obviously urging caution to minimise the risk of transmission throughout a care home, does offer opportunities for a flexible and personalised approach. For example it states *'care home providers should develop a policy for limited visits (if appropriate), in line with up-to-date guidance from their relevant Director of Public Health and based on dynamic risk assessments which consider the vulnerability of residents. This should include both whether their residents' needs make them particularly clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 and whether their residents' needs make visits particularly important'*. Therefore if someone we support wishes to receive a family visit (or it is deemed to be in their best interests), indoors or outdoors, we need to consider that individuals' circumstances and weigh up benefits and risks accordingly, in consultation with the person and his/her family.

The Achieve together policy in relation to visitors equally applies in care homes and supported living services. The supported living guidance on visiting provides similar emphasis on balancing the need to minimise 'in person' visits with any adverse impact this may have on the personal wellbeing of tenants – we therefore strive to create safe opportunities for such contacts to be realised as much as is feasible.

This is a really important part of what Achieve together does every day, enabling ordinary lives and supporting people to remain engaged and in touch with their loved ones. Of course, importantly we do need to be mindful of those people who are more clinically vulnerable, and for us that is not only those people who were 'shielded', but others who did not fit that 'category' but do none the less have significant healthcare needs.

Helpfully, we are now in a position to have access to regular testing in care homes. As this is new to learning disability homes we are just in the process of establishing a routine and system for that. Support teams will be tested weekly, and people who live in the home will have monthly access to testing. We can, subject to sufficient supplies, include families into our testing schedules by prior liaison with the manager. We have formally raised this as an issue with Care England, and LDE (Learning Disability England) who can support with lobbying these issues.

We have a current active campaign to get as many of our workforce to have the flu vaccine as soon as possible, in addition to the people we support. This also will be an important health protection measure in the coming months to reduce the risk of seasonal flu and help reduce support team absences at this critical time. We would urge families to also have their flu vaccine, so that if you are making contact with your relative you also are offering that protection. Don't forget to book yours at local pharmacy, GP or supermarket.

As Achieve together supports people in both England and Wales, some aspects of guidance and legislation are the same, but there are also differences. This is not straightforward but we have an operational management team who work closely with our central support teams to interpret the differences and ensure the right guidance gets to the right support teams. We have regular updates from the local authorities, and they are very good at engaging positively with their local providers.

It's an important consideration that everyone in society has a duty to play their part in minimising risk of transmitting COVID-19, including people with learning disabilities – without overly restricting their lifestyle. We have risk plans in place for each person related to COVID-19, what we are now in the process of arranging, is for each person to have a COVID-19 section within their care and support plan, to ensure that within the plan we are



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fully considering lifestyle changes during the pandemic and how we maximise each person's potential for the duration of restrictions. This will be particularly important over the winter months as the days become shorter and weather is not so favourable.

We hope that you are keeping very well during these uncertain times. If you have any further questions, please view the [COVID-19 family resource](#) section of our website, do address any questions or concerns specific to your loved one with the team at the service or email our Family Liaison Team: families@achievetogether.co.uk. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for understanding and ongoing support and encourage you to have a look at our website and the materials provided there, which are being continually updated.

Please note, if you would like to receive direct updates, you can sign up to our mailing list [here](#)

My best wishes to you and your family,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Emma Pearson'.

Emma Pearson, CEO