

## Visiting relatives in care homes across Sheffield

### Background:

In October 2020, we heard about a variety of approaches that care homes in Sheffield were taking to facilitate visiting during Covid-19. There were examples of good practice, such as homes which used WhatsApp to keep in contact with friends and family, and homes which have done individual risk assessments to facilitate visits. In other places, we heard that a more blanket approach was being used. New [local guidance](#) was released, aiming to support homes to develop a more individualised approach for their residents.

In November, we wanted to take a more detailed look at how this was working for some of the city's care home residents and their loved ones. We supported a national [John's Campaign](#) survey which asked the relatives of care home residents how visiting has worked for them, and how the home has tried to support meaningful interactions.

The survey ran from 5<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November. We heard from 23 respondents in Sheffield, who shared their experiences about 18 different care homes in the city.

### Key local findings:

- Just under half (11) of respondents said a visiting policy had been shared with them. There were concerns about lack of clear information about visiting policy. For example:

*“Although not shared in writing, in practice, the visiting policy has been frequently adjusted in light of events. Notably, when the virus got into the Home..they eased up on the restrictions & allowed me compassionate visits, as my relative became seriously ill, & could easily have died... My relative survived, & now we are the policy has been changed again, back to the restrictive regime prior to the outbreak. The changes, & lack of clarity about these, have been hard to cope with.”*

- Only 1 respondent said that they had been involved in an **individual visiting risk assessment**.
- 10 respondents said the homes were allowing **no visiting** during this period - 1 respondent said they had not been able to visit since before the start of the first national lockdown.
- 5 people said they didn't believe the home allowed for a change in visiting due to **exceptional** circumstances. One person described how despite their relative not doing well, it wasn't considered 'exceptional'.

*“We ring every day, told relative isn’t doing well but it’s not classed as end of life so we can’t visit.”*

- 5 respondents said they received regular updates from the home about their relative - 11 received none, and 7 said the updates were variable.

*“I have to contact care home for updates....”*

*“I have had 2 letters since March 2020. No phone calls at all.”*

*“The updates come in the form of newsletters to all relatives, which are effectively propaganda messages & don’t make any reference at all to the well-being of residents. They only comment on how tough things are for the staff & managers, & what a fab job they think they are doing. They leave me with the firm impression the Home is run for the benefit of the staff, & owners, and residents barely count. Relatives are seen as ‘external others’ and not as people who could be a source of support to staff as well as residents. It is so sad!”*

*“The manager sends us weekly updates + extra emails if needed. So communication is excellent. She is open about setbacks and difficulties..... The only area where I now feel the need for improvement is in giving us more detailed information about our mum’s wellbeing. But I know I can ask for this.”*

*“It is very rare the unit phone is answered”*

- Some respondents felt the staff had done the best they could under difficult circumstances.

*“They have done a great job, there have been no cases of covid.... I trust the staff, who are fantastic, to take good care of her.”*

*“All the staff at my father’s care home have done their utmost for him. But going from regular visits and days out to not being able to see him is torturous. Why couldn’t we be tested and used as staff to help out when we could I will never know.”*

- The impact on the mental and physical health of residents and family has been significant; visits such as window visits have in some cases added to distress.

*“Dad is depressed as he feels we have abandoned him, he is a very loving tactile person”*

*“I can’t sleep with the worry. I know the staff are all exceptional but they aren’t his [family] it’s not the same. I need to cuddle him It’s torture.”*

*“On the last occasion I visited mum, (around two months ago) the experience was so horrendous, I only stayed 10 minutes. The supervising visit carer, was extremely hostile and excessively authoritative. I can’t imagine any ‘official prison’ visit more distressing and disturbing.”*

- Use of technology for contact is variable; lack of time, and access to equipment is having a negative impact on some individuals

*“Gone from being able to at least try to go each week to nothing now. More than two occasions haven’t even been able to do FaceTime as either staff can’t work it or the phone hasn’t been answered.”*

*“There is good intent from the care home but they are not equipped or trained in online resources”*

*“I appreciate the difficulties but care homes are not geared up or resourced appropriately for technology”*

*“Manager staff are very good, allow video call as often as possible, empathise with families”*

- Some respondents felt that without their visits their relative wasn’t getting the care they needed.

*“Looks like a different person, been stripped of their identity both physically/literally and hypothetically. The physical difference in images is frightening. The loss of skill is shocking, e.g can no longer seemingly use cutlery, doesn’t wear false teeth... the weight loss & greying skin is harrowing to see.”*

*“My Nan has stated she wishes she was dead. She doesn’t feel that she can wait any longer for her family to see her. We would visit every day and help care for her. Her mental health does pick up when she is stimulated but lack of stimulation from family has resulted in severe depression anxiety and suicidal thoughts.”*

- Where homes aren’t allowing visiting, the most cited reasons were:

- Following government guidance - 7
- Waiting for updated local guidance - 7
- Covid outbreak in last 28 days - 6
- Following instructions from head office - 4
- Lacking facilities for safe visit - 4
- To protect residents from Covid - 4