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| ‘WINTER’ VISITING POLICY |
| During Covid-19 Pandemic |

*This Policy summarises the measures N Notaro Homes Ltd takes to be responsible and open regarding visiting people at risk in their care homes when following government guidelines.*

**INTRODUCTION**

**Aim**

This policy aims to ensure that our CARE HOMES are fully compliant and follow government guidelines regarding people visiting their loved ones during these uncertain times. We must protect our residents from COVID-19 because they are classed as high risk given their medical conditions and reasons for being in a care home. The care homes approach will be to risk assess each individual and take the following into consideration:

* The safety of residents, their visitors, and staff
* Whether residents are shielding
* The risk of infection.

**Purpose**

This policy aims to provide a set of principles and tips to help people using care and support to have the opportunity to safely receive visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic while minimising the risk of its introduction to, or spread within our care home settings.

We recognise how difficult it has been for both people living in our care homes and the families and friends and staff who care for them to restrict visits, and the importance of finding ways to start to enable visits again in a risk-based and balanced way, and help reduce the inevitable anxiety experienced by families and friends of those in our care homes as they have been unable to visit for some time.

This is intended to compliment and not replace the very creative and innovative ways in which we have been facilitating virtual visits, connecting people via technology to keep in touch where they are unable to visit and this will continue.

**Background**

The policy is intended to help during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is anticipated to last for a sustained period, compared to the usual period for other infectious outbreaks such as influenza and norovirus. As we see other parts of our community experiencing a small degree of easement of the lockdown rules in England it is important to recognise that for people in residential care settings there is a need to balance the continued management of COVID-19 risks with a cautious approach enabling the opportunity to receive visitors.

The Human Rights Act recognises that people living in our care homes have the right to freedom of movement and association, including the right for residents to see their families and friends. This policy seeks to balance the rights of the individual with the rights of others within the care home and the duties and responsibilities of N Notaro Homes Ltd to minimise any risk to residents and staff.

For many people living in our care homes it is very important that they are able to experience ‘in person’ visits; especially those with cognitive impairment or dementia whose understanding of the current situation may be limited and who may be significantly affected by the absence of visits with a deterioration in their overall health and wellbeing. People with communication difficulties are another group for whom ‘in person’ visits are key as ‘virtual visits’ can be very challenging.

Many of our residents are at higher risk of catching COVID-19 and having poorer outcomes due to co-morbidities and many may be shielding (e.g. having been admitted from home or hospital recently). The approach to enabling visitors will be based on the circumstances of the individual settings, the individual needs of the residents and the external COVID-19 environment in the individual care home.

There will be a range of responsibilities on and expectation of visitors to our care homes which each individual care home will set out in their own procedure for visiting and a risk assessment.

Given the uncertainty about the future progress of COVID-19 and difference in local transmission rates, we and all our care homes will be working in a dynamic situation that will require constant vigilance.

**Principles for considering how to enable visitors in our Care Homes.**

N Notaro Homes Ltd.’s care homes will take a dynamic risk based approach to how to facilitate and manage visits, which will consider the safety of all residents, staff and visitors and minimise the risk of any COVID-19 infection.

This will have to balance the risk of harm to residents not having visits, with the risk of harm to residents, staff and visitors. We will ensure a person-centred approach and take account of individual needs and capabilities.

**Types of Visits**

Visits may occur in several ways:

* **Window Visits:** This will need safe ground floor window access for both residents and their visitors and the relevant social distancing and PPE measures must be observed
* **Outside Visits:** Relevant PPE measures, masks, gloves and aprons (for visitors) and social distancing will apply. Access to the outside visiting area will need to be separated from the care homes. Areas will be covered to facilitate different weather conditions. Protocols will be in place for cleaning of the areas and any items used between visits. Refreshments will not be provided. Visits will be for 30 minutes and will need careful planning using an appointment diary. A member of staff will be designated to facilitate each visit. Visitors will be asked to wear their own masks when they visit.
* **Designated areas within the care homes for ‘Winter’:** depending on the physical layout of the care home it is found to be possible to enable visits to an identified location inside the care home reserved only for this purpose away from residents and staff and visitors having access from outside of the home.
* **In room visits:** These visits may continue to be facilitated as appropriate in line with national guidance in relation to end of life visits to ensure the person can die with dignity and comfort, taking into account their physical, emotional, social and spiritual support needs. PPE measures must be observed and where possible only one person to visit at any one time, unless circumstances suggest that depending on individual needs and the support needed by the individual visitor two people can visit.

The range of visits made available will be discussed and monitored with each individual care home, their residents, staff and their visitors. Letters will be sent to all relatives and Next of Kin to keep them up to date with visiting procedures.

**Procedures**

The company will work closely with their Home Managers to ensure they work closely with their staff teams to provide appropriate support to facilitate visits safely and in line with all relevant guidance.

Our care homes will **carefully regulate and limit the number of visits** initially to minimise the risk of introduction of COVID-19; for example, enabling a one-person visit at a time. Visits will be limited to a single consistent visitor which enables us to limit the number of visits to the home. The consistent visitor will be identified by the person living in the care home, if the person does not have capacity or the understanding to make the decision a discussion will be had with the legal representative of the resident and decisions made in the persons best interest.

Children will not be able to visit currently given the guidelines and PPE and social distancing measures as of June 2020.

Visits between residents and their visitors must **operate fully in line with the latest infection and prevention and control guidance** including provisions relating to the use of designated areas for visits and the use of social distancing practices, good hand hygiene and use of PPE. Visitors must wear their own mask, aprons, gloves and Visors will be provided where needed.

**The following code will apply to all our care homes:**

* Visits must be booked in advance for a specific day for 30 minutes duration
* Visitors must contact the care home on the day prior to their visit at least 2 hours before to ensure the situation in the care home has not changed
* The visitor must be free of any COVID-19 symptoms.
* The visitor must not be unwell on the day of their visits
* The visitor must comply with the infection prevention and control measure, including a temperature check, mandatory hand hygiene and the use of PPE and social distancing and remain in the designated visiting area until the visit finishes.
* The visitor must ensure any gifts brought to the individual they are visiting can be sanitised in line with infection prevention and control guidance.
* It must consistently be the same visitor until further guidance is received.

Each care home will discuss with potential visitors the best way to get to and from the home. Wherever possible visitors should try to walk or travel by car and **avoid public transport when visiting the home,** in line with the latest government advice on travel during COVID-19.

**Ability to suspend Visiting**

In the event of any suspected or actual outbreak of COVID-19, or a suspected or known case of COVID-19 within any of our care homes, visitor restrictions will be implemented and include non-essential visitors. This will be implemented in a transparent manner with open and clear communication to residents and relevant family members.

Each care home will vary their responses to enabling visits in person depending on COVID-19 risk changing within their local community, using a risk-based approach.

**Effective Communication**

Each care home will ensure that they communicate effectively with relatives and other key stakeholders in an open and transparent way about their approach to visiting.

**This policy will be reviewed and updated at least 3 monthly in line with updated Government Guidelines.**