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Dear family member,

Much has changed since I last wrote to you. The Government's roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions has given us all much to look forward to. The vaccination rollout continues to go well, and there is a light at the end of the tunnel at last.

We are all looking forward to seeing more of our loved ones as restrictions gradually ease, but these changes have raised some important questions which I would like to address here.

Have all your staff taken up the offer of vaccination against Covid-19?

We are doing everything we can to support and encourage our staff to be vaccinated.

We are:

- Paying for travel and time for staff to go to vaccination appointments
- Collecting data on how many staff have taken up the offer of vaccination. We will use this information to prioritise further information and support
- Making it clear in contracts for new staff that they may be required to be vaccinated against Covid-19, and recommending that they do so.
- Providing clear, accessible, accurate information about the Covid-19 vaccines:
 - A myth buster which we have shared with all staff
 - A conversation toolkit which supports managers to answer the most frequently expressed concerns about the vaccines
 - Links on our staff intranet to clear, accurate videos and publications aimed at people from a wide range of backgrounds and beliefs.

I know that some friends and family of people we support are concerned that not all our staff have yet taken up the opportunity to be vaccinated. We understand and share these concerns.

We have worked hard to investigate and understand the various reasons for some staff members' uncertainty about vaccinations. We are helping to increase their confidence in the vaccines through information and support information about reducing transmission to others and have seen take up rise in response.

At present, in common with most social care providers, we have no plans to make Covid-19 vaccination mandatory for our staff. We will keep this under review and be guided by both scientific data and legal advice.



What are you doing to make sure my loved one is being vaccinated?

The inclusion of people with learning disabilities in the priority 6 group was a welcome and overdue change.

It was wrong for people with learning disabilities to be left off the priority list for vaccinations, and we have been vocal about this throughout the pandemic. We spoke directly to the Government about our concerns that people with learning disabilities had not been prioritised, particularly when the data showed that they were at substantially greater risk than the general population.

We are now working hard to enable the people we support to receive their vaccinations. We are doing this by:

- ensuring that they are on their GP's learning disability register
- ensuring that GPs are aware of the need for people with mental health conditions to be vaccinated
- advocating on their behalf to ensure that they are given prompt access to vaccination appointments.

I am happy to say that many of the people we support have already been vaccinated and numbers are increasing daily.

When will the rules about visiting my loved one change?

The easing of lockdown started from 8 March 2021. There have been some slight changes to visiting guidance for people who live in registered care homes.

At the moment people we support, unless in registered care homes, should follow the same restrictions as the general public. As soon as we have any further information about changes to rules for people in supported living services, we will let you know.

People who live in a registered care home can now have one regular visitor. This visitor will have access to testing and PPE. Where people we support require personal care, they can also nominate an 'essential family carer.' This person will have access to the same testing and PPE as staff so they can provide support with washing, dressing, eating etc. If this applies to you, please speak to your service manager.

Visits for other loved ones can continue with other protection in place, eg. substantial screens, visiting pods, visits behind windows and outdoor visits.

How are you using testing in your services to keep my loved one safe?

We continue to follow government guidelines on testing. In our registered care homes staff take tests weekly, and people we support take tests monthly.

In our supported living services we ask staff to take tests weekly. They report any positive results immediately.

If staff members test positive we support them to self-isolate by paying full wages for the period of isolation. This has been our policy throughout the pandemic.

Finally, I want to thank you all once again for your sustained support and patience. Almost a year on from the first lockdown, we are all tired and impatient for a return to normal life. I remain immensely proud of the creative, diligent and high-quality support provided by my colleagues to your loved one, and encourage you to speak directly to their support staff if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Tim Cooper

Chief Executive