



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

28 January 2021

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 November on behalf of your constituents about visits to care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I understand your constituents' concerns and recognise the particular challenges that people with dementia and their families are facing at this time. We know how important it is for care home residents to spend time with their loved ones. While we have high levels of infection in the community and are in a period of national lockdown, we want to achieve a balance between the risk to residents and staff of the virus' being brought into a care home and the importance of visits for residents' health and wellbeing.

In the face of a new variant of the virus, we have acted to protect those most at risk in care homes and ensure visits can go ahead safely in some form. Unfortunately, this means that restrictions need to be placed on what kind of visits can take place and close-contact indoor visits are therefore not currently allowed.

Whilst I understand this poses difficulties for some people with dementia, visits to care homes can continue to take place at a window, or with arrangements in place such as substantial screens or visiting pods. Robust infection control measures, such as handwashing, hand sanitising and appropriate personal protective equipment, must be maintained throughout the time in the care home environment. Visits in exceptional circumstances, such as at the end of life, should always be supported and enabled. In the event of an outbreak in the home, it should immediately stop visiting (except in exceptional circumstances), to protect residents, staff and visitors. The full guidance can be found at www.gov.uk by searching for 'visiting care homes'.

There is a range of guidance to support people with dementia, and those caring for them, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes [guidance](#) published by the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the NHS on looking after people with dementia in care homes, and guidance on the adjustments needed to the NHS's Well Pathway for Dementia, which is primarily for clinicians but can be used by carers and people with dementia.

I hope this reply assures you and your constituents that, while we must help care homes keep their residents and staff safe from COVID-19, we are doing everything we can to help support those with dementia and their loved ones.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', enclosed within a light blue rectangular border.

HELEN WHATELY