



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

9 May 2022

Dear Harriet,

Thank you for your letter of 11 March, on behalf of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, about ongoing visiting restrictions in care homes. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

I can assure you I recognise the importance of allowing care home residents to meet their loved ones safely, and I appreciate your specific interest in this matter, given the ongoing inquiry into the human rights of residents and their families in England's care settings. As you will know, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) submitted written evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on 12 April.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government has sought to balance the protection of vulnerable people with the importance of allowing access for families and friends. As you say, nationally set restrictions on visiting in care homes have been lifted, and guidance remains clear that blanket bans on visiting are unacceptable and visiting should be facilitated wherever possible.

As part of the Government's approach to living with COVID-19, the remaining barriers to visiting have been reduced as much as possible, while keeping people in adult social care settings safe. The Government's latest guidance no longer asks most visitors to test but continues to ask them to take necessary precautions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, in line with the wider population. This includes not visiting if they are COVID-19 positive or symptomatic. Free lateral flow device tests remain available for the small number of visitors and visiting professionals who provide personal care, as they will be asked to test during periods of high prevalence. Free PPE also remains available for some visitors, based on a risk assessment.

I know just how important contact with relatives and friends is to the health and wellbeing of care home residents. The Government continues to advise that even during a COVID-19 outbreak, care home residents should be able to receive one visitor inside the care home. End of life visiting should always be supported and tests should not be required for end of life visits.

If someone thinks that a care home is not following visiting guidance appropriately, they should raise it with the care home in the first instance. They can also contact the Care Quality Commission (CQC), which follows up on all visiting concerns raised with it. The CQC assesses whether a provider is enabling visiting as part of its monitoring approach, and as part of all adult social care inspections.

DHSC ministers are also considering legislative options, and how their effect would differ from the current complaints process. The CQC already has regulatory powers against those not following guidance, such as issuing requirement notices and warning notices where providers do not appropriately support visits. During the pandemic, DHSC has collected data on care home visits to inform policy and guidance, which is published monthly and will continue. Latest data from 22 March indicates that 95 per cent of care homes in England were able to host visitors.

Thank you once again for writing, and I trust this response assures you of the Government's continuing commitment to the safety and wellbeing of care home staff, residents and visitors. I would be grateful if you could forward this response to your Joint Committee colleagues, along with my sincerest thanks for all your invaluable work in this area.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is a cursive name that appears to be 'Harriet Harman'. The bottom signature is a stylized, more abstract cursive signature, possibly 'J. Harman' or similar.

The Right Honourable Harriet Harman QC MP