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| **Title:** | COVID-19 Policy Statement |
| **Synopsis:** | To outline and give assurance to stakeholders the key policy drivers and interpretation within Freeways services |
| **Status:** | Draft |
| **Version No:** | 01 |
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| **Author:** |  |
| **Date approved:** | XXX |

**Diversity Impact Analysis**

Freeways wishes to ensure that its policies and procedures do not impact unfairly on employees with protected characteristics. Managers must therefore ensure that the application of this policy and procedure does not have an adverse impact on such individuals or groups. Concerns about any detrimental impact should be immediately raised with the HR manager.

**Review**

This guidance will be reviewed after 2 monthly or earlier in line with any legislative requirements.

**Issue Date:**  XXX

**Review Date:**  XXX

**Change Record**

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7. **Introduction**

Freeways endeavours to ensure all its services are fully compliant with the latest government guidance and reviews its procedures as soon as practicable after any update to that guidance.

Government guidance varies in different social care settings according to their registration with government bodies and activities undertaken within the service.

Although some services may look similar they may be working under different guidance for example in relation to visitors and testing.

For the latest government guidance please visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-social-care-guidance>

Freeways Existing Policies

Many of the existing policies are relevant to the provision of care during the pandemic. In some cases the policies have been updated in line with Government guidance and learning from the pandemic. Some of the key policies in place and available on request include:-

* Health and Safety at Work
* Infection Prevention and Control
* Risk Management
* MCA & Best Interest
* Safeguarding

The following policy statements have been developed to address specific issues that have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Visitors**

Freeways services follow government guidance which is linked to the national alert level, social care guidance for services, PHE (Public Health England) guidance regarding any outbreaks and testing for visitors.

All services have their own dynamic risk assessments which will change depending on the above factors.

All services request that visitors contact the service prior to visiting to ensure it is safe to do so to avoid any wasted trip and to understand any procedures that might be in place to ensure the safety of the people we support, our staff teams and visitors.

Additional Safety Measures for Visitors:

Many visitors to our services may or will be requested to undertake additional checks. These can differ from service to service due to the different testing regimens offered by the government. They may be requested to:

* Undertake a Lateral Flow Test (LFD test) which can identify if someone has COVID-19 within approximately 30 minutes (if a test is required, visitors will only be allowed in the service once the result is complete and is negative)
* Complete test and trace information – either complete a form or use an app on your mobile phone
* Have their temperature taken
* Asked to wash their hands or use hand gel
* Wear a mask, gloves, face shield and/or apron depending on the service need.

Failure to comply with the guidance for the service may lead to the service asking an individual to leave.

1. **Vaccinations**

Staff

The government is currently considering whether it makes vaccinations compulsory in health and social care settings and a consultation is in progress until 21 May 2021 (<https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/making-vaccination-a-condition-of-deployment-in-older-adult-care-homes> ).

It is, however, widely recognised that all the vaccinations are safe and effective in reducing the risk to both individuals receiving the vaccination and those around them.

Freeways would prefer all staff to have chosen to have a vaccination but it is aware that some individuals cannot have the vaccination for a variety of reasons and some people have chosen not to have the vaccination.

Where staff choose not to take up a vaccination the reasons should be recorded by their manager and Freeways reserve the right to transfer staff to another service to protect service users who are vulnerable.

Freeways seek to ensure staff have the most up to date information and any decision they make has been informed by fact and not mis-information from unreliable sources. Freeways encourages all staff to have the vaccination where it is safe to do so for both their welfare, that of the people we support, their colleagues and any visitors to our sites.

Frontline workers in social care, are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 at work and the COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of staff suffering from COVID-19 disease, although the evidence on the extent to which the COVID-19 vaccination reduces the chance of staff passing on the virus is still being collected.

Most vaccines reduce the overall risk of infection and therefore it is expected that vaccinated staff will be less likely to pass infection to their friends, family and to the vulnerable people that we care for, as well as reducing the risk to them.

Freeways is proactive in the communication of opportunities for front line staff to have vaccinations and staff are entitled to be paid for their time in attending an appointment for a vaccination.

Freeways has vaccination guidelines which relate to a number of other vaccinations recommended by PHE including annual flu vaccinations and Hepatitis B. Where prescription costs are required for vaccinations, Freeways reimburse these as set out in the staff expenses policy within our financial manual.

People We Support

Freeways have supported the individuals within our care to also have the facts about the vaccination in a format they are most likely to understand. This has been supported by easy read information and films available from the NHS and PHE.

Where individuals are unable to make their own decision regarding the vaccine or are unable to tolerate a vaccination by injection, the staff within the services have been liaising with their GP as the decision maker under the Mental Capacity Act to ensure a best interest decision is undertaken and any reasonable adjustments made to reduce any potential barriers.

Bank and Agency Staff and Restriction of Staff Movement:

Freeways preference is to use bank and agency staff that have been vaccinated but are aware that this may not always be possible. However, all staff, including agency will be required to be fully compliant with the latest government guidance and Freeways procedures.

During the pandemic, wherever possible, bank and agency staff are to be used within a single service and are not regularly expected to work across multiple sites. There are some restrictions of movement of staff within regulated services and these can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/restricting-workforce-movement-between-care-homes-and-other-care-settings/restricting-workforce-movement-between-care-homes-and-other-care-settings> .

1. **Testing**

There are two types of tests available at the moment. These are:

* Lateral Flow Tests (LFD) – these tests are also known as rapid tests and provides a result within 30 minutes.
* Polymerase Chain Reaction Tests (PCR) – these tests are completed and then sent off to a laboratory for assessment. These are known to be more accurate.

In all services where staff directly support individuals, it is Freeways policy that those staff must complete a PCR test weekly (where they have not tested positive for covid in the last 90 days) in line with PHE guidance.

Staff in all care homes and some supported living environments also have access to LFD tests. Where this is available staff must complete in line with PHE guidance i.e. at least twice a week in most circumstances.

Further guidance and detail on the testing regimen expected can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-in-adult-care-homes>

It is strongly encouraged that staff who do not fit into the above category should apply for free LFD tests from the NHS and complete these before coming into work.

Care homes residents are encouraged and supported to complete a PCR test at least four weekly although this is increased if there is an outbreak in line with government guidance.

Adults living in their own home including supported living services are supported to access LFD tests in line with the general public and PCR if they are showing any symptoms or in line with advice from PHE.

1. **Personal Protective Equipment**

Freeways currently provides ample personal protective equipment to ensure all staff and visitors are able to comply with current legislation and guidance. Staff are able to supply visitors to the service with equipment for the duration of their visit and support them to understand the safest process for putting on, removing and disposing of the equipment to reduce the possibility of contamination.

Governement guidance is available detailing recommendations for what PPE to use, in which scenarios, and in which service type. This has been interpreted by Freeways and guidance has been shared with all services. When there are any updates Freeways guidance is changed and shared again with services.

1. **Wellbeing**

We recognise that the subject of the COVID-19 and related issues can be divisive and lead to the expression of strong opinions. However, employees, visitors and the people we support must remain responsible and respectful when communicating with others and consider the impact of their decisions/actions on others, wherever possible.

Freeways does not expect any behaviour towards its staff, visitors or people it supports that could amount to bullying or harassment, for example mocking a colleague's views on COVID-19 vaccinations or forcing their views on COVID-19 vaccinations onto others.

Any person who is offended by, or concerned about, another's behaviour in this regard should raise the matter with management and/or can raise a complaint via our grievance procedure. Conversely, managers should appropriately raise concerns with individuals whose actions could be seen to directly impact staff, visitors or the people we support.

Freeways has an employee assistance program which has a number of wellbeing resources that staff can access independently and confidentially.

Freeways have regularly sign-posted staff and managers to resources/support available throughout the pandemic.

Staff have been given the opportunity to meet with their manager and discuss their wellbeing and complete a wellbeing check in addition to their regular supervision and this should be repeated and reviewed as required.