

# Stow Healthcare

Winter 2022

Business Continuity Plan



Stow  
Healthcare

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# INTRODUCTION

Stow Healthcare is a family run group of care homes based in East Anglia, who specialise in turning around failing care homes, making them beacons of outstanding care. We have four homes in Suffolk: Brandon Park Nursing Home, Manson House Care Home, Melford Court Care Home and Stowlangtoft Hall Nursing Home, two homes in Essex, Halstead Hall Care Home, and Cedars Place Care Home; and one home in Norfolk, Ford Place Nursing Home. Five homes are registered for nursing, with two being solely residential homes.

We have approximately 500 full and part time staff, and 350 beds across the group.

We have a compact and focused central support function, consisting of two directors, one with strategic and finance responsibilities, and the other who manages day to day operational matters. We are supported by a Head of Finance, Head of Care and Compliance, and other staff at managerial level overseeing estates and operations. We have additional group support to oversee finance, admissions, operational functions, medication safety and maintenance. During 2022, our team has grown to reflect our development as a company, taking on additional staff to oversee admissions and estates, as well as operations and finance.

Our 2022 winter-focused Business Continuity Plan has been developed as part of the evolution of the COVID Business Continuity Plan that began in March 2020 as an addendum to our ongoing BCP work. The winter-focused plan takes a fresh look as we approach winter at challenges posed not just by COVID, but the wider challenges that winter 2022 is likely to bring as we see hikes in energy prices (impacting our homes directly and staff in their own homes) and continued recruitment pressures in social care.

This document will be reviewed as required to reflect changes in government guidance, best practice considerations, and the evolving local and national picture in terms of control of the COVID virus.

# AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim is to ensure that all homes are able to operate safely and confidently through Winter 2022/23, in accordance with the most up to date government guidance.

The document sets out measures to ensure that:

- lines of accountability throughout the organisation remain clear
- arrangements for various scenarios are formally set out
- likely challenges are anticipated and planned for
- management and staff in each home have a sound understanding of processes and protocols
- critical government guidance is adhered to
- outbreak arrangements are clear
- homes remain warm and well supplied through winter to support safe care

In addition, critical information for all staff can be found in the 'Keeping Yourself Safe this Winter' Handbook for staff, which summarises safe working practices, and supports staff to manage risks effectively.

## Challenges To Overcome

**Challenge One: COVID Variants**

**Challenge Two: Resurgence of Other Winter Diseases**

**Challenge Three: Further Outbreaks of COVID in our Homes**

**Challenge Four: Social Care Staffing Issues**

**Challenge Five: Rising Energy Costs**

**Challenge Six: Winter Supply Issues**

**Challenge Seven: Cold Weather Management**

**Challenge Eight: Effective Cooperation**

# VES OF PLAN

## Provider oversight

Stow Healthcare Group staff will ensure that homes can continue to run safely. Our separate 'Chains of Command' document, made available to management teams, sets out the contingency planning and deputising systems that come into effect where key members of the management structure are incapacitated.

A number of Stow Healthcare group staff may not need to enter homes on anything apart from an occasional basis. When required by government, all group staff will be part of any testing regime, and adherence to this will support access that may be required to homes.

Stow Healthcare completed its roll out of its 'Access/iCare' electronic care and compliance system in 2020. This roll out continues to ensure effective remote oversight of care planning, review of home auditing, and safe administration of medication. Where new homes are added to our portfolio, they will be supported to adopt the group's electronic systems in a timely way

Quality assurance of homes may, in part, be completed remotely. However, in line with current IPC guidance, key staff overseeing quality and care in homes will continue to access homes as required, in accordance with the following guidelines:

- PPE should be worn appropriately according to the work being completed
- Special care should be taken when sharing care home offices, in terms of social distancing and wearing of masks
- Group staff should coordinate to ensure that sensible allocation of visits is taking place to support homes equally, according to need at the time

Directors and senior staff will have responsibility for the following:

- Support for any outbreaks, swift reporting and identifying lessons to be learned
- Ensuring that stocks of PPE are maintained safely and in sufficient quantities, and that the homes are fully utilising the PPE Portal
- Ensuring that IPC measures in each home are being managed effectively, as reviewed through a robust auditing process, and that the process is being effectively led by a named staff member in each home, with staff trained to ensure effective IPC measures are being routinely used.
- Reviewing the outcome of CQC or commissioner-led IPC inspections to learn from good practice and note findings of provider collaboration reviews
- Communicating effectively with all stakeholders, residents, relatives, staff and those commissioning or regulating our services

# CHALLENGE ONE: COVID VARIANTS

## Issue

All viruses regularly mutate as they replicate to create new variants. Most mutations have little or no effect and are not a cause for any concern. Some, however, pose an increased risk to public health due to changes in transmissibility, infection severity, ability to evade immune responses or the virus's susceptibility to treatments.

## Impact

It is possible that emerging variants may be less responsive to the vaccination programme and lead to higher rates of illness or mortality.

## Response

The government's autumn COVID booster campaign launched on 5 September. It is accessible to all our residents and staff. Stow Healthcare will therefore:

- Support all residents to receive their booster, including supporting new residents who join us who are partially vaccinated, or unvaccinated to access vaccines;
- Ensure booster vaccines are offered at the earliest possible opportunity to maximise protection to residents;
- Ensure consent documentation is completed in a timely fashion so absence of consent does not hold up vaccination;
- Stay alert to evidence around variants of concern and ensure that staff and visitors are well informed so they can minimise opportunities to bring infection into our homes.
- Encourage high take up of the autumn COVID booster amongst staff, promoting it in our monthly communications, facilitating on site vaccination by GPs where possible, as part of resident vaccination programmes, and using social media channels to reach staff.

# CHALLENGE TWO:

## RESURGENCE OF OTHER WINTER DISEASES

### Issue

Given the very low levels of influenza activity over winter 2020/21 and the mild influenza season in 2019/20 it is likely that population immunity to influenza will have diminished.

Experts predict a resurgence of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19, influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

Outbreaks of RSV in the autumn and influenza in the winter could be around twice the magnitude of a 'normal' year, and might overlap (at least partially) with a peak in COVID-19 infections.

The impact of norovirus should also not be underestimated, given its prevalence in winter and its impact in care homes.

### Impact

A wave of winter illness could see residents and staff negatively impacted. Unvaccinated staff and residents could become very unwell. This could have an impact on management of poorly residents in the home, with staff becoming overwhelmed, or a rise in residents needing to be admitted to hospital.

From a staff perspective, staff off sick will lead to additional pressures in the home, with other staff having to pick up more shifts and wellbeing and morale as a whole, suffering.

### Response

Stow Healthcare will:

- Support residents and staff to access annual flu vaccinations at the earliest possible opportunity;
- Ensure that any directions led by government in terms of testing to identify other winter respiratory illnesses is adopted swiftly to support good health outcomes;
- Support nursing and senior care staff to develop their awareness of other winter respiratory illnesses, so that they are able to identify symptoms and seek appropriate help;
- Ensure all staff are reminded of varying sanitising measures that may be needed to protect against spread of differing winter illnesses, including where handwashing with soap and water is needed as opposed to hand sanitising gels.
- Remind visitors to our homes to avoid visiting the homes with respiratory or viral illnesses until fully recovered.

# CHALLENGE THREE:

## FURTHER OUTBREAKS OF COVID IN OUR HOMES

### Issue

COVID rates have ebbed and flowed throughout 2022, but it is likely that COVID will continue to increase in prevalence throughout the course of the winter, likely entering our homes regularly. Absence of asymptomatic testing may mean staff without symptoms unwittingly bring it into homes more frequently than last winter when staff were testing daily.

### Impact

Although the vast majority of our residents and staff are fully vaccinated, we know that this does not mean that people will not get infected with, or ill from COVID. Whilst severe illness or death is less likely post vaccination, it still remains a possibility.

This has implications in terms of managing care and safe staffing when homes.

### Response

**Stow Healthcare will support staff by:**

- Ensuring that all staff and relative contact details are reviewed and updated to support urgent communications, including over winter holiday periods
- Continuing to ensure that testing regimes are adhered to, according to latest government advice
- Continuing weekly 'Stowbra' group meetings for all management teams, so all homes are communicated to swiftly and accurately about national and local risks
- Communicating with staff at least monthly, or as changes are required

**Stow Healthcare will support residents and their families by:**

- Following all government guidance for the admission and care of care home residents
- Ensuring visitors are well informed about visiting protocols, updated through relatives' meetings, including when outbreaks occur
- Providing easy read communications to support residents to understand key COVID developments in the home; regular resident meetings in the home, led by management
- Working in conjunction with services to prevent unnecessary admission to hospital, wherever this can be avoided.
- Ensuring that responsible staff have access to admission prevention contacts out of hours.



# CHALLENGE FOUR:

## SOCIAL CARE STAFFING ISSUES

### Issue

There are considerable issues in recruiting staff at all levels in social care. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and also, for some, by last year's mandatory vaccination programme and BREXIT.

### Impact

The impact is threefold:

1. Management are spending significant time addressing staffing gaps at the expense of other tasks;
2. Staff are often working overtime which can have an impact on wellbeing;
3. Residents are at risk of not receiving quality care at all times if gaps are not addressed promptly.

### Response

Stow Healthcare will focus on recruitment, absence and resilience by:

- Continuing to review existing or arising vacancies across all settings, working diligently to fill roles through innovative means. Additional management resources on marketing and HR have been put in place to focus on recruitment of staff. Safe recruitment methods will continue to be deployed in line with regulatory requirements and guidance.
- Supporting all our staff by following the Staff Wellbeing and Attendance Policy, ensuring that all sickness is discussed with staff and that where there are concerns about persistent, disruptive absence, this is addressed through correct channels to minimise impact on colleagues and residents.
- Ensuring that each home has a Resilience folder, setting out key processes to be completed to keep the home running safely in the event that the management team were all absent and head office staff have to step in.
- Ensuring that critical processes in each home are able to be completed by more than one staff member, with a list of expected processes therefore back up, with competent staff to support.
- Minimising agency usage and ensuring all agency usage is signed off at director level. Staff rotas should be prepared sufficiently in advance so that any possible gaps can be reviewed, and alternative solutions can be found. If all alternatives have been explored, and agency staff are required, staff should only be requested from a limited pool of preferred suppliers.
- Developing our international nurses programme; in 2022 we have become a licensed sponsor and have been working to recruit our first cohort of overseas nurses. It is anticipated the first cohort will arrive before the end of 2022

# CHALLENGE FIVE:

## RISING ENERGY COSTS

### Issue

Spiralling energy costs have the potential to do significant harm to the social care sector during winter 2022/23 and beyond. Care England and Box Power CIC have published data that shows a 683% increase in energy costs for care providers between August 2021 and August 2022. Significant increases are also seen for providers buying forward for the next 12 months. The government has announced caps for business, but these are only due to last 6 months, and may have a limited impact. Staff will also be impacted personally by rising energy costs in their own homes.

### Impact

The measures announced by government will potentially halve the price businesses were due to pay, but prices will still be double those of last winter. This means costs will have to be cut elsewhere in the business, or fee increases due next April may have to be increased beyond normal rises.

Staff will see price increases in spite of the measures announced by government, which will cap costs over the next two years

### Response

Stow Healthcare will:

- Continue to work with Care England to understand developing government policy on this critical issue
- Ensure that energy use in homes is optimised, without impacting on resident care and wellbeing
- Ensuring doors and windows are closed, draught excluders are used where appropriate, LED lightbulbs are used, radiators are fully functioning and staff are made aware of the importance of turning lights off where not needed etc
- Explore renewal energy opportunities - two homes are already served by biomass boilers, which provide cheaper fuel sources
- Procurement and finance colleagues will work together to secure most effective energy contracts, where not already in place for homes
- Provide sources of support for staff who need guidance around managing concerns of domestic energy costs.

# CHALLENGE SIX:

## WINTER SUPPLY ISSUES

### Issue

Due to Brexit, which has created significant staff shortages across many critical sectors, including retail and haulage, and supply chain issues that have been further impacted by COVID, we anticipate that this winter could see us face some difficulties beyond the usual issues around inclement weather. Rising fuel prices, and fuel supply chain issues, have already occurred in the last 12 months, and could occur again this winter.

### Impact

Winter supply issues could impact our homes in different ways as follows:

- Fuel accessibility could impact heating and electricity generation options at our homes, as well as staff being able to get to work.
- Retail shortages could impact our ability to access usual variety and delivery of food, drink, and critical consumables.

### Response

#### Impact of failure of food, fuel or PPE supplies:

- Our group staff continue to work hard to ensure continuity of supplies. Our homes are located in an accessible group, and operate cooperatively. We have a two month stockpile of all key PPE, hand sanitiser and liquid hand soap. Homes hold an additional week's supplies on site, in addition to the managed stockpile at group stores.
- We are able to absorb price rises in fuel for heating and power. In addition, we have one third of our homes with heat powered by biofuel.
- We are sourcing business continuity plans from our key suppliers to ensure that we can feel confident in disruption management.

#### Impact of inclement weather:

- We accept that inclement weather may impact on the efficacy of communications via email or telephone for example. Where a site or the system is impacted, urgent contact will be made with the IT/Communications providers, or BT as appropriate, to ensure that communications may be quickly restored (see key contacts section).
- Where an individual site only is impacted, the home management will contact head office to seek support that may be required in terms of staff or families being updated centrally.
- We will also use our website and social media pages to ensure that families can be kept informed if a home is being impacted by adverse weather conditions, which may be impacting communications, ability to access a home etc.

# CHALLENGE SEVEN: COLD WEATHER MANAGEMENT

## Issue

Our elderly residents, particularly those with chronic cardiorespiratory diseases are at risk from extremely cold winter temperatures. Failure to plan for cold weather and maintain our homes effectively could put residents at risk. The government's Cold Weather Plan, updated annually and last in October 2021, provides guidance that supports us to protect our vulnerable residents from harm caused by cold weather.

## Impact

Cold weather is associated each winter with an increase in deaths and has a significant impact on morbidity. An estimated 28,300 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales in winter 2019 to 2020. Even with climate change, cold related deaths will continue to represent the biggest weather-related cause of mortality. There is documented evidence of care home residents dying from hypothermia. CQC cover this in their 'Learning from Safety Incidents' information series.

## Response

- Stow Healthcare will ensure that its senior team and managers are aware of and have given due consideration to the current Cold Weather Plan and any updates.
- Directors, the Estates Manager and Home Managers will sign up to the Met Office Cold Weather Alert emails to receive pre warning to support homes
- The Estates Team will review heating systems across all homes in good time ahead of cold weather, ensure that annual servicing checks are completed, and any fuel level alert systems are functioning to prevent issues of concern so far as possible.
- All bedrooms and communal rooms should have a digital wall thermometers, in order that temperatures can be quickly checked.
- Any use of portable fan heaters will only be on the basis of thorough individual risk assessment, for short term use
- Consideration will be given to all measures to support warmth – suitable clothing, blankets, hot meals, hot drinks and draught prevention
- Supporting staff awareness of impact of cold – signs of hypothermia etc

# CHALLENGE EIGHT:

## EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

### Issue

A more integrated health and social care system will provide better outcomes for our residents. During COVID, in many ways these systems have become more effective, despite the challenges that the pandemic has presented.

### Impact

The positive impact of effective cooperation will be seen in the following outcomes:

- Good management of contracted beds, with trusted relationships and regular communication.
- Safe and timely discharge from hospital settings.
- Good follow up for ongoing treatment.
- Avoidable hospital admissions at a low level.

### Response

Stow Healthcare will:

- Work hard to ensure that commissioners and regulators are kept well informed about life in its homes, and that all best practice is implemented in its homes.
- Ensure that admissions and contract management processes are conducted professionally through the Group Admissions Coordinator.
- Report to UKHPA in a timely way in relation to potential outbreak management.
- Follow all government guidance to manage admissions to the home, re-admissions to hospital and discharge as safely as possible.
- Consider support for innovative pilots such as 'virtual wards' to support hospital admission prevention

# KEY CONTACTS

## General

[add contacts here]

## Suffolk

## Essex

## Norfolk

# KEY INFORMATION RESOURCES

**NHS COVID Guidance:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

**NHS 111:**

<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

**Local Resilience Forums:**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-resilience-forums-contact-details>

**Care England:**

<http://www.careengland.org.uk>

# Stow Healthcare Winter 2022 Business Continuity Plan

## **Cold Weather Plan for England, HM Government**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/cold-weather-plan-for-england>

## **Infection Prevention and Control in Adult Social Care Settings, HM Government**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infection-prevention-and-control-in-adult-social-care-settings>

## **Infection Prevention and Control in Adult Social Care: COVID 19 Supplement, HM Government**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infection-prevention-and-control-in-adult-social-care-covid-19-supplement>

## **Learning from Safety Incidents: Issue 8: Hypothermia**

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/learning-safety-incidents/issue-8-hypothermia>

