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## **Open letter to care homes, residents, family and friends**

I know that not seeing visitors or not being able to see a family member or friend who is elderly, frail and vulnerable is distressing for all concerned. Many of us working at the council are personally struggling with this too.

There is no doubt visits from friends and relatives are important to the mental health and wellbeing of residents, and during the summer months, where infection rates were much lower, I wrote to care homes to recommend that visiting should be allowed, so people could have much needed contact, although I know that some homes chose not to do this, to minimise risk to their residents.

But in the last month, cases in Gloucestershire have more than quadrupled, with a number of these linked to care home staff and residents. This is why I made the difficult decision to issue the advice to suspend visiting, before it was too late to slow the spread of the virus.

The first wave saw many people lose relatives and friends in care homes. I really want to reduce the opportunity for the virus to get into care homes again and then spread between residents and staff.

Whilst I have indicated that normal visiting should be suspended, I have no desire to keep families and friends apart any longer than is necessary. We are urgently working on finding ways that we can help strengthen infection prevention control measures that could allow visiting to recommence. We are not quite there yet but will review the situation every week.

Under certain circumstances, care homes can allow visits, for example where home managers feel a visit is critical to health and wellbeing and can be managed safely.

I understand that some people feel strongly that families and their relatives should be able to make their own judgement about the risk of C19 to their loved ones, but we must also remember that care homes have many residents, who may feel differently.

I know it is little substitution for a physical visit but wherever possible I know homes continue to support virtual visiting and I want to thank care home colleagues for all they are doing to support residents and their families during these most difficult of times.

Thank you for everything you are doing to prevent the spread of the virus and I truly believe that by working together we will overcome it, stop the misery it brings and be able to reunite with our loved ones.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Scott".

**Sarah Scott**  
**Director of Public Health**  
**Gloucestershire County Council**