

 The experiences of relatives of care
home residents during the Covid-19
pandemic

Lancashire

June - July 2020



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About Healthwatch Lancashire

Healthwatch Lancashire (HWL) was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Care Act 2012.

Healthwatch England acts as the national consumer champion for all local Healthwatch organisations, enabling and supporting HWL to bring important issues to the attention of decisions makers nationally.

the views of people who use health and care services in their local area, seeking to ensure that their experiences inform the improvement of services.

HWL are constantly listening, recording and reporting on the views of local people on a wide range of health and care issues, ensuring that people in the county are able to express their views and have a voice in improving their local health and care services.





Executive summary

Healthwatch Lancashire (HWL) in collaboration with Lancashire County Council (LCC) Quality, Contracts and Safeguarding Adults Service, created three surveys. The surveys were designed to provide a 'snapshot' of the experience of people living in, working in and who had relatives in care homes in Lancashire during the pandemic.

The feedback from the surveys will inform quality improvements, identify outstanding needs and improve communication between care homes and families.

This report focuses on the feedback given by 82 respondents to the survey for the relatives of residents in care homes. The responses came from 24 different care homes. The questions mirrored those on the survey given to residents.

All respondents told us that they felt they could contact the care home if they felt worried. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ felt that their relative was treated with dignity, they felt informed about their relative's care, that their relative was safe, respected, valued, listened to and that they were given the opportunity to speak to their relative (via phone or video). Over half felt that their relative was not bored or lonely.

Respondents felt that their relative was safe as a result of enhanced safety and hygiene measures and care homes doing everything they could to keep them safe.

Over half felt that nothing could have been done differently. Although some people told us that they would have liked more communication (from the care home), emotional support for residents, earlier testing for staff and lockdown taking place earlier.

Many respondents told us of their gratitude towards care home staff and managers and how they feel they have done an excellent job. Concerns that people did raise, in many ways, reflect the themes and problems of lockdown in a wider sense.

There were three respondents in particular who have experienced issues during this period, this is explored in more detail later in the report.



Project rationale

As part of our remit to explore and understand the views and experiences of people in Lancashire, Healthwatch Lancashire (HWL) use an approach called 'Enter & View'. This is a method we use specifically to understand the experiences of people living in and working in care homes, as well as the views of residents' relatives and friends.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown, HWL were unable to conduct any 'Enter & View' visits in local care homes. Instead, working in collaboration, HWL and Lancashire County Council Quality, Contracts and Safeguarding Adults Service created a series of questions designed to explore how care home staff, residents and relatives of residents were coping during the pandemic. It was agreed that there would be three separate questionnaires, one for care home staff, one for care home residents and one for the family and friends of care home residents.

Analysis of feedback from the surveys will provide both a 'snapshot' of life living in/working in/having a family member in a care home in Lancashire during the pandemic of 2020.

In turn this will:

- **Inform short and longer term quality improvements.**
- **Identify outstanding needs, such as bereavement or mental health support.**
- **Improve communication between care homes and families.**

Responses to this survey suggest that life for all of those involved with care homes may be very different to the 'pandemic life' experienced by most people and they are facing and dealing with a multitude of challenges. At the same time we were aware of some amazing examples of great service delivery under tricky conditions. We wanted to hear about these experiences and understand how people have managed and are continuing to manage during these unusual and difficult times.



Methodology

A letter explaining the purpose of the surveys, was sent to all care home managers in Lancashire (a copy of the letter is available in Appendix 1).

It was agreed that the three surveys would be presented as part of an online survey distributed to the managers of care homes within Lancashire. Generally the questions would focus on:

- How are staff managing to continue providing a quality service? What are their challenges?
- What is different and the same for residents?
- What challenges are the families of residents facing?

This report concerns the findings from the survey that was given to the relatives of residents in care homes.

They were asked the following questions, which are worded in a similar way and ask the same thing as the questions presented to care home residents.

1. During the pandemic and the lockdown period, did you feel your relative was safe?
2. Do you feel they are valued?
3. Do you feel they are bored?
4. Do you feel they are lonely?
5. Do you feel they are listened to?
6. Do you feel they are treated with dignity?
7. Do you feel they are kept informed (about the action necessary during the pandemic)?
8. Have you been given the opportunity to speak to your relative, via phone or video call?
9. Does the care home keep you informed about your relative's care?
10. Do you feel you can contact the care home staff if you are worried?
11. Do you know what the care home have been doing to keep your relative safe?
12. Would you like to tell us about this?
13. Is there anything you feel should have been done differently?
14. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?
15. Name of the care home.

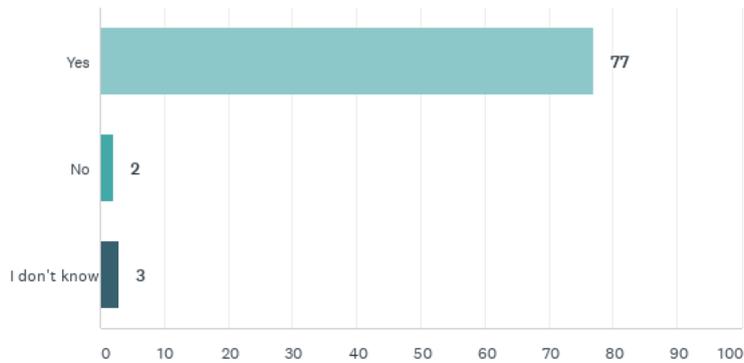
As well as a letter, the surveys were promoted through wider networks, via social media and on the HWL website.

The surveys went 'live' on Survey Monkey on 1st June and were closed on 17th July.

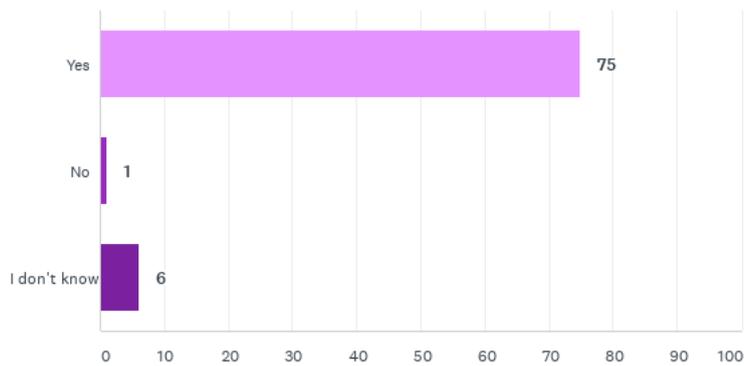
Qualitative data analysis was undertaken by the Data and Research Officer on behalf of HWL

We had 82 responses to this survey.

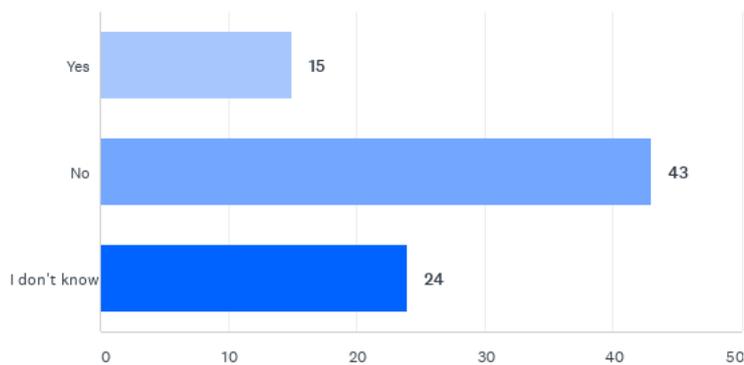
Q1 During the pandemic and this lockdown period, do you feel your relative is safe?



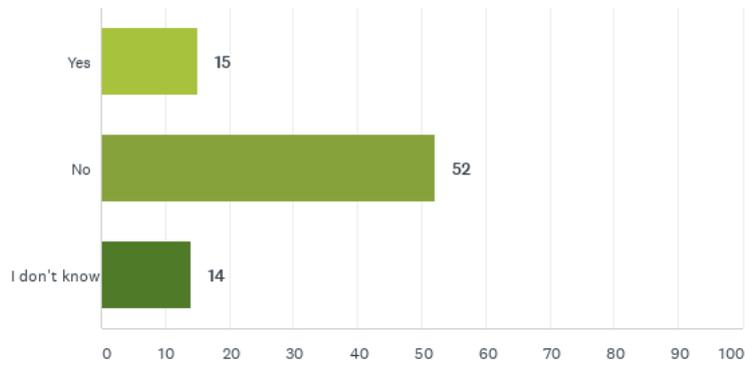
Q2 Do you feel they are valued?



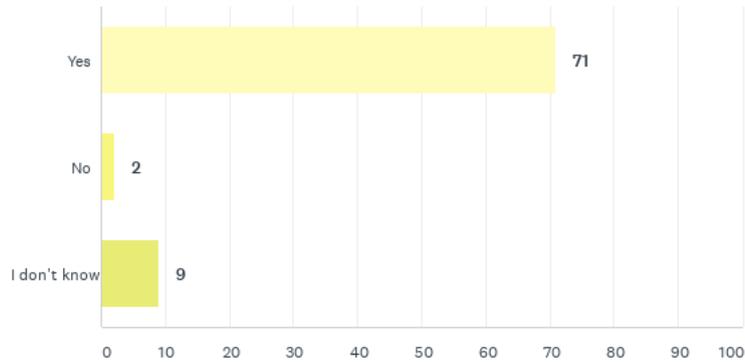
Q3 Do you feel they are bored?



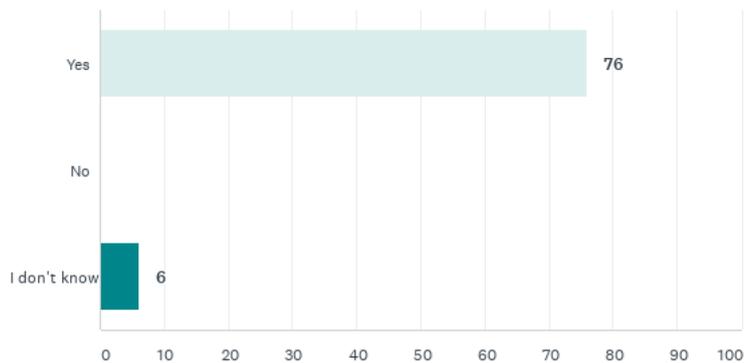
Q4 Do you feel they are lonely?



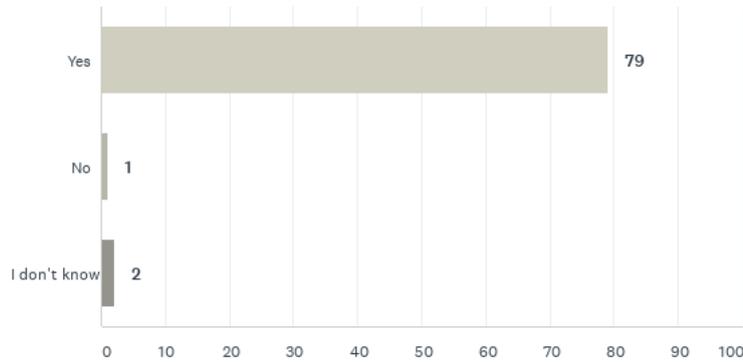
Q5 Do you feel they are listened to?



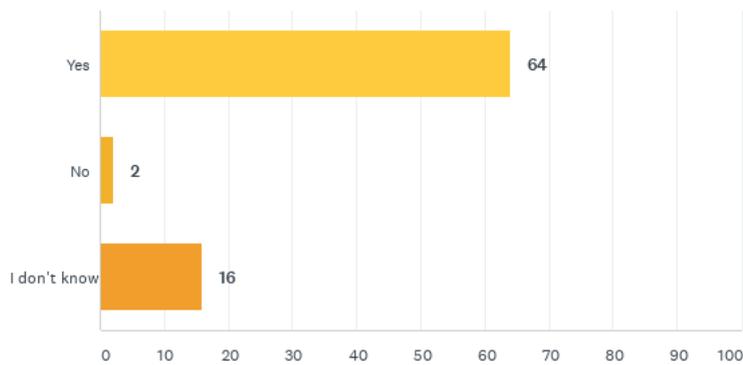
Q6 Do you feel they are respected?



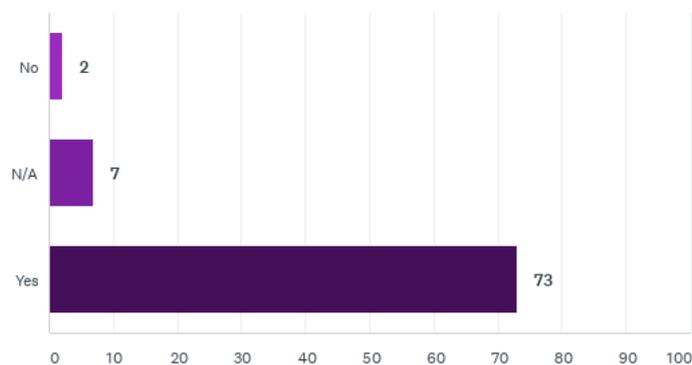
Q7 Do you feel they are treated with dignity?



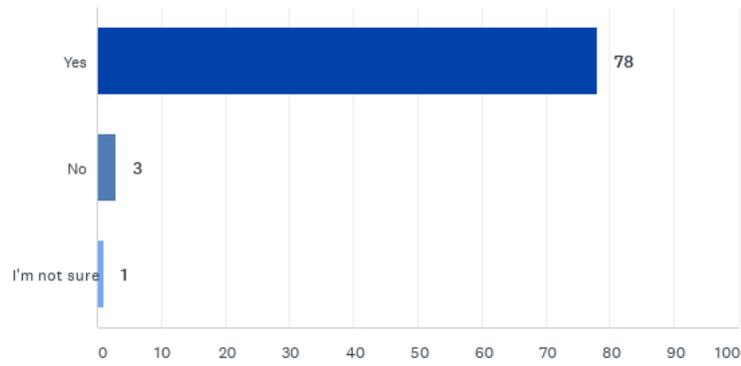
Q8 Do you feel they have been kept informed (about the action necessary during the pandemic)?



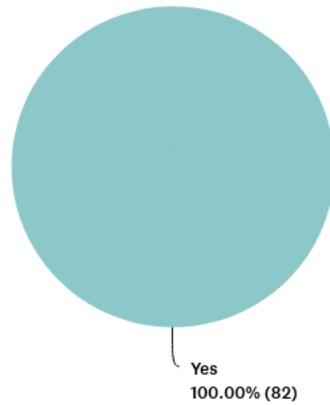
Q9 Have you been given the opportunity to speak to your relative, via phone or video call?



Q10 Does the care home keep you informed about your relative's care?

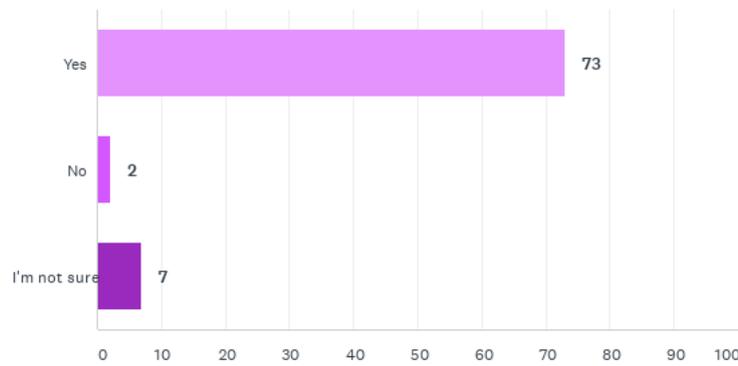


Q11 Do you feel you can contact the care home staff if you are worried?





Q12 Do you know what the care home have been doing to keep your relative safe?



Would you like to tell us more about this?

"I have been delighted by the care dad has received from the staff during this difficult time. The home has remained free of Covid 19, due to the hard work and vigilance of the staff. They have positively encouraged regular communication between me, my sister and dad, and have facilitated this at all times. Our frequent FaceTime calls have been a source of great comfort to all of us."

"The home are doing everything possible during this pandemic and following all the guidance and ensuring all residents are safe."

"I feel so lucky to have such a great team caring for my mum."

25 respondents told us of the safety measures and regulations that care homes had put in place to protect residents. Another 12 said that they felt homes had done "everything possible" and taken quick action at the start of the pandemic. 21 people said they were kept well informed (via Facebook group, email, phone, newsletter or photos). Other comments referred to an increase in entertainment provided to the residents and videos of staff wearing PPE to reassure relatives.

Although the majority of comments were complimentary, not all relatives have had a positive experience. Three people said that communication had not been good and raised other concerns (which will be addressed later in this report.)



Is there anything you feel should have been done differently?

“Yes, plan for emotional wellbeing. Letting her go for a walk or to sit outside. Encouraging exercise while she has been confined to room. Better thought for spiritual care. More thought about the home being a household and activities in small group.”

“At a national level I felt that older people in care were an after thought, in fact I don’t think the implications of healthcare decisions were thought through/explained in terms of the consequences for this group of people. Once again the social care/NHS split had devastating consequences.”

“Care home has understandably been trying incredibly hard to prevent covid and have done that amazingly well, but social and emotional needs have not been catered for. I feel that the lack of national guidance has hampered best practice to people who are struggling with workload and a stressful situation.”

52 people said that they felt there was nothing that could have been done differently.

Suggestions for what could have been done differently, included:

- More communication, from the care home to relatives (3 people).
- Enabling communication from residents to family, in the evening when people had finished work (1 person).
- Making a plan to support residents’ wellbeing (2 people).
- Going into lockdown sooner (2 people).
- Keeping Covid-19 out of the care home (1 person).
- Earlier and more frequent testing of staff (2 people).



Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Most people said that they had nothing else to tell us. Many others left compliments about care home staff and the care that their relative had received, they wanted staff to know that they have done/are doing a brilliant job and that they are very grateful.

“Every single member of staff have worked through this pandemic and cared for my mum amazingly. They have face timed me to allow me to speak to mum and encouraged me to ring anytime. I cannot thank them enough for all their hard work.”

“The staff have been wonderful throughout coronavirus when it must have been very difficult and challenging for them.”

“The staff & care they give is amazing - they deserve a medal.”

“This is an exemplar care home and should be used as a good practice guide for other homes - care and compassion shown is unlimited and genuine too.”

Although most responses were positive, as with the previous question, some people raised concerns that arose from their experience:

- My relative feels sad and deprived of her liberty.
- My views about pastoral care and exercise were not taken into account.
- A lack of consistency across care homes, including some homes “letting positive Covid-19 cases back in.”
- Other problems having to “take a back seat”.
- Some Local Authorities not as effective as others.

With the exception of Covid-19 positive residents being sent back to care homes, these concerns are not just confined to care homes, but have emerged as themes from more general research into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (see the Healthwatch Together series of reports into the effects of the pandemic on people living in Cumbria and Lancashire, [available here.](#))¹

“Whilst the staff have been beyond first class and kept the residents safe from the virus, I am concerned about the dementia sufferers and the effect that isolation from friends and family will have had. Phone calls and FaceTime with dementia sufferers are not a substitute for real contact. This is by no means a criticism, far from it, just a concern at the effect of the last 3 months.”

¹<https://healthwatchcumbria.co.uk/coronavirus-survey-reports/>



Serious issues raised

Three respondents in particular raised serious issues and concerns via the survey. They were concerned that their relative was either/or not safe, not valued, or not treated with dignity. The residents were based in three different care homes, so this has not been identified as a cause for concern within one care home.

The comments people left are printed below. Some details have been removed from the original comments in order to ensure anonymity.

“The care home was not very good at communicating at the start of the pandemic. They let relatives know there was an outbreak within their home via a public message on Facebook. They was re-admitting residents from the hospital that still had Covid. It’s hard to get hold of anyone over the phone at times to get updates on relatives. Before Covid we had no issues with my nan’s care but feel the home managed poorly for the first 8 week of the outbreak.”

“My relative has had Covid and has survived. He’s been restricted to an isolation room and then his own room. He’s lost over 30kilos, and has been outside once since the home went into lockdown. He spends a lot of time in bed as he will get up and needs to be in view at all times and this is impossible in his room with understandably low staffing levels. He’s fallen twice since lockdown. I used to feed him over an extra 2000 calories daily and can’t do that now. I’m over 70 and diabetic and worry about when it will be safe to visit. In many ways the nursing home have done their best, but if they were to keep Covid out they would have needed to have staff living in, but I think this would have been impossible.”

“It has made mum very sad and feels like she has been deprived of her liberty Whilst recognising that the staff have cared to prevent coronavirus and they have done this exceptionally well it has seemed to be the only focus.”

“There should be consistent guidelines throughout care homes. Some were letting positive Covid cases back in to homes and others weren’t. There have been 19 deaths in my nan’s care home since Covid that I know of.”



Recommendations and response from Lancashire County Council

Although all respondents told us that they felt they could speak to the care home if they were worried about something, some people were very worried and do not appear to have spoken to staff at the care home. Worries about people with Covid-19 returning to care homes and a lack of emotional support have caused distress for some relatives. Others have said they didn't feel their relative was safe or felt they were not kept informed. These respondents give the impression that they did not address their concerns with the care home.

The recommendation from HWL, as a result of these findings, is for LCC to ensure that relatives know how to raise a concern and who they should raise it with. There seems to be a gap where relatives feel they can contact a care home but they don't seem to be doing this when they are worried about a particular issue.

Lancashire County Council have accepted the findings detailed in this report and have responded to the recommendations:

LCC will review previous work on this and work with LCC Complaints Management team, LCC Communications, LCC Safeguarding and LCC Contracts and Quality Team to promote pathways for families to raise issues and concerns.



Conclusion

The survey was sent to 433 care homes in Lancashire. We received responses from 82 relatives of people living in care homes from 24 different care homes.

- All respondents felt they could contact the care home if they were worried.
- 96% felt that their relative was treated with dignity.
- 95% felt informed about their relative's care.
- 94% felt their relative was safe.
- 93% felt that their relative was respected.
- 91% felt their relative was valued.
- 89% said they knew what the care home had been doing to keep their relative safe.
- 89% said they were given the opportunity to speak to their relative via phone or video (9% said this wasn't applicable to their situation.)
- 87% felt that their relative was listened to.
- 78% felt that their relative had been kept informed, about the necessary action during the pandemic.
- 64% felt that their relative was not lonely.
- 52% felt that their relative was not bored.

Positive responses to these questions were high, except for loneliness and boredom. Residents feeling lonely and/or bored have been a recurring theme in HWL's Enter & View reports, varying according to the care home and the individual resident. It is likely that this has been exacerbated by lockdown and the resulting lack of visitors.

Most respondents felt that their relative was safe as a result of enhanced safety and hygiene measures put in place by the care homes. Many also felt that the care home staff were doing everything that they possibly could to keep residents safe.

There were some concerns over poor communication and one person was worried for the safety of their relative because the care home was accepting people from hospital who had tested positive for Covid-19.

63% of respondents felt that nothing could have been done or handled differently during the pandemic. Of those who left comments, people would have liked more communication, support for the emotional wellbeing of residents, earlier testing for staff and the care home going into lockdown sooner.

When we asked respondents if there is anything else they would like to tell us, 62% said no. Many people said that they were very grateful to care home managers and staff and that they had done a brilliant job. The concerns that were raised in response to this question were similar to those raised in more general surveys examining people's experience during this time; boredom, lack of freedom, and treatment for non-Covid health problems being delayed. Others were more specific to care homes, such as hospital discharges and a lack of consistency across care homes and local authorities.



Appendix 1: copy of letter sent to care home managers

Dear Colleague,

I'm writing to you today as the Director of your independent local health and social care champion, Healthwatch Lancashire. We are an independent organisation that gathers, explores and amplifies the experiences of people who access health and social care services. We use this information to drive improvements and service design.

One of our key functions is the carrying out of Enter and View visits. This is an opportunity for our staff to get a feel, first hand, for what it's like to live in a particular care home. We do this by undertaking a site visit in which we talk to managers, staff, residents, families and carers about their experiences.

In the context of Covid we have suspended Enter and View visits for the safety of staff and residents. However we know sharing experiences and being heard is perhaps more important now than ever before. We realise that life for all those involved with care homes is very different from the norm and that everyone is facing and dealing with many challenges. And we know that there are many fabulous examples of great service delivery under difficult conditions and examples of exciting innovations.

With this in mind, we have agreed with Lancashire County Council (LCC) to create and share three online surveys to find out about how everyone is coping in the current climate. These surveys look at topics such as:

How are managers and staff managing to continue to provide a quality service?

What is different/the same for residents?

What challenges are families facing?

Through the links below, you will see that we have designed separate surveys for managers and staff, one for residents and one for families/carers.

[Family of Residents](#)

[Residents](#)

[Care Home Staff](#)

To share these surveys as far as possible we will be promoting via our social media channels. However, we would also greatly appreciate your support in sharing and completing these surveys. By responding yourself, by circulating this letter and these links as widely as possible amongst the care home staff, residents and families and perhaps also by offering support to those who may need it to respond, you can help us to hear the experiences of care home communities.

Responses will greatly help Lancashire County Council and its partners to better understand your experience of COVID 19; the Council has told us that they are really keen to hear what it has been like and have offered their commitment to using your feedback to help their work now and in the future. Our Research and Data officer will independently analyse the results and provide a report which we anticipate could inform:

- A snapshot of what it's been like managing/living in/having a family member in a care home during COVID 19
- Short and longer term quality improvements
- Outstanding needs - possibly bereavement support, MH support for staff etc.
- Improved communication between homes and families

The surveys will go live on Wednesday 3rd June and you will have until midnight on Sunday 28th June to respond. This is your chance to have your experiences and the experiences of your residents heard. We are aware that Public Health England (PHE) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are due to conduct a separate, nationwide study of COVID-19 and care homes. Where the PHE and ONS survey looks to gather national trends, by completing our survey you will help us to understand, specifically, the challenges faced within our county.

The raw data gathered will remain confidential unless there is a need to address a specific safeguarding or quality issue, in which case normal processes will be applied. The final report for LCC will not link themes and/or issues identified to individual homes. However, where innovative and best practice has been highlighted, permission to name the particular home will be agreed with the home prior to the report being finalised.

If you have any questions, or if we can help you in anyway, please contact me or the wider Healthwatch Lancashire team.

Kind regards

Sue Stevenson

Director of Healthwatch Lancashire

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