

Delays and Missed Visits: Contingency Planning and Arrangements Policy

Purpose and Scope of this Document

This document outlines the organisation's procedures in relation to any external circumstances that might mean a need to change the agreed service at short notice.

This includes situations where care workers have been unavoidably delayed in visiting at the agreed time or are likely to miss a visit, because of, for example, an accident or car breakdown.

The policy focuses on the arrangements needed when individual staff members are unavoidably delayed or their visiting schedule disrupted by circumstances beyond their control.

It also covers situations where a number of staff could be unavailable due to the spread of infectious illness, adverse weather conditions, industrial actions producing transport difficulties, security alerts, etc. That is, any set of circumstances where it becomes difficult to apply the cover arrangements that are made for individual service users as described in the continuity of care and responsive services policies.

Principles

The agency is committed to being as responsive as possible to service users' needs and preferences in line with the following principles.

- *Reliability* — we make sure that the people who use our services can depend on them.
- *Flexibility* — we are prepared to adjust the services we provide to meet the changing needs and circumstances of the people who use our services.
- *Continuity* — our services are planned to provide the maximum degree of continuity and the fewest possible changes of the people who use our services.
- *Communication* — we undertake to consult and communicate with service users and their representatives as fully as possible about their service.

Procedures to be followed in the event of delays or missed visits

- Where it is known that care workers are going to be away — for example, on holiday or if they give in their notice — the agency will inform the service user as soon as possible and discuss the alternative cover to be put in place.

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- If an expected carer is suddenly unavailable — for example, having been taken sick — the agency will immediately arrange for someone else to visit. Wherever possible this will be someone already known to the service user. The affected service users will be contacted as soon as possible to inform them of any changes made to their visiting schedule.
- The agency expects its carers who are unavoidably late by a set number of minutes (as decide by the agency e.g. 5 or 10) with a call to make contact with the agency or with the service user/agreed contact person directly so that they are kept informed of the reasons for the delay and expected time of arrival.
- Care workers are expected to record their times of arrival and departure using the methods adopted by the agency. They are then expected to record and account for the reasons for any significant delays or missed calls.
- If a care worker or team of care workers does not arrive at an expected time without prior information the service user / informal carer should contact the agency as soon as possible to find out what might have gone wrong and how the situation can be put right.
- The duty manager will then contact the care worker (s) involved and work out an appropriate plan of action, taking into account the assessed risks to the safety and well-being of the service user(s) and the availability of alternative means of support for the person or people affected by the delay(s).
- The procedures to be followed are set out in the agency' service user guide and are discussed with the service user prior to the start of the service (with reminders given periodically where needed), including the time frames beyond which any delays in service need to be acted upon by contacting the duty manager.
- Where the service user is dissatisfied with the reliability of the service provided they are encouraged to discuss the issues with the agency management or to put in a formal complaint.
- The agency will not normally charge for missed calls or for any failure to carry out specific services that have been agreed and which have not been carried out, because of delays and lack of time caused by delays. Any compensatory arrangements needed will be made on an individual case by case basis.
- If the agency discovers that a care worker has deliberately missed calls, arrived late for appointments without good reason or failed to complete all agreed tasks, it will start disciplinary proceedings on the grounds of possible misconduct.

Issue Date	12/03/2022	Review Date	11/03/2024	Version	2
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Procedures to be followed in the event of possible delays to a service or missed visits as a result of major emergencies

- In the event of unforeseen, unavoidable delays that could affect a number of service users and staff the duty manager will work to a predetermined but up-to-date set of priorities to make sure that any service user who is at risk from any failure or delay in receiving the service is contacted and visited as soon as possible.
- All staff affected by any potentially disruptive event or circumstances are expected to contact the agency as soon as possible to report any problems in carrying out their schedules of visits.
- The duty manager and other staff will undertake to make contact with every service user affected to explain any delay and to check on the individual's situation. Further work will be based on an assessment that the person is safe or whether there might be any risks to the person's safety and wellbeing as a result of any delay in service.
- Where it is difficult to communicate directly with an individual service user who might be put at risk from any failure to visit or significant delay, the agency will contact a named person who has agreed to be contacted in an emergency and who is in a position to check that the person is safe. This person could be a partner, other relative, neighbour, accessible volunteer or other professional depending on the individual situation.
- Available staff will be allocated to service users in line with their priority needs, which are based on known risks to personal safety. No person who is considered to be at risk will fail to receive a service that ensures they are kept safe and their priority needs are met.
- If it is impossible to provide a service because of the prevailing conditions, which would only be to someone who has not been assessed as being at risk, the reasons will be clearly communicated to that person and a service will be provided at the earliest possible opportunity.
- In deploying staff in contingencies such as heavy snow or an epidemic of infectious illness the agency is aware of its health and safety responsibilities to its staff and will take these into account and manage them in line with the relevant health and safety policies and procedures.

Contingency Arrangements with Other Agencies

- To make sure that the service is disrupted as little as possible in emergency situations, the agency has entered agreements with Local Authority/Health Service commissioners and other registered agencies to ensure continuity of service in emergency situations if needed. Where practicable the agency attempts to form mutual agreements so that it could also help other providers to address their emergency situations.

Issue Date	12/03/2022	Review Date	11/03/2024	Version	2
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- The agency has also built up a substantial bank of staff who can be called on to meet contingencies. In developing its bank the agency is mindful of the need to enable its staff to be accessible to service users in emergency situations by recruiting them from the areas near to or in which service users live.
- The agency is committed to close communication and working in co-operation with other agencies and professionals, who might be involved with individual service users or service provision more generally to make sure that people’s needs are addressed and met. This can be particularly important where individual users are at a risk as a result of care worker delays or missed visits and where they are subject to collective contingency arrangements such as when they might have to be evacuated from their homes because of fire, flooding, damage to their property, etc.

In these cases, the agency will work in line with its responsive service and continuity of care policies by committing and adapting its resources to make sure that it can address the needs that have been agreed.

Training

Staff receive training in the agency’s contingency planning measures and in the procedures to be followed in the event of both short and more significant delays in their service delivery.

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