

# My Views Matter: Phoenix House Care Home Snettisham



Healthwatch Norfolk visited Phoenix House on 07/12/2022 to see and hear how people experience care there.

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# Who we are and what we do

Healthwatch Norfolk is the independent voice for patients and service users in the county. We gather people's views of health and social care services in the county and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

The people who fund and provide services have to listen to you, through us. So, whether you share a good or bad experience with us, your views can help make changes to how services are designed and delivered in Norfolk.

Our work covers all areas of health and social care. This includes GP surgeries, hospitals, dentists, care homes, pharmacies, opticians and more.

We also give out information about the health and care services available in Norfolk and direct people to someone who can help.

At Healthwatch Norfolk we have five main objectives:

1. Gather your views and experiences (good and bad)
2. Pay particular attention to underrepresented groups
3. Show how we contribute to making services better
4. Contribute to better sign posting of services
5. Work with national organisations to help create better services

We make sure we have lots of ways to collect feedback from people who use Norfolk's health and social care services. This means that everyone has the same chance to be heard.

# Introduction

## Enter and View

Part of Healthwatch Norfolk's work programme is to carry out Enter and View visits to health and social care services, to see and hear how people experience care. The visits are carried out by our authorised representatives. We can make recommendations or suggest ideas where we see areas for improvement.

The Health and Social Care Act allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies.

Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service. Equally they can occur when services have a good reputation, so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Healthwatch Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies.

## My Views Matter

From September 2022 – March 2023, our Enter and View visits will be part of a project called 'My Views Matter'. This project is specifically focused on residential and in-patient care for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in Norfolk. We are implementing this project in response to the tragic events at Cawston Park, in which three residents with learning disabilities died between 2018 and 2020. One of the key findings from the Safeguarding Adults Review was that residents and their families were not being listened to.

My Views Matter will involve visiting around 20 residential homes across Norfolk to find out what people with learning disabilities and autistic people, and their families, want from their residential care. It will also investigate whether residents' and their families' views are being taken into account in how care is delivered. The 20 homes have been selected to provide a representative sample of homes in different areas of the county, different CQC ratings, different sizes of home, and different sizes of provider chain. These are all aspects which professionals have told us affect the ability of homes to deliver personalized care effectively.

Alongside the Enter and View visits to homes, we are also interviewing family members and professionals in the sector and organizing focus groups with care home residents outside their homes. The project is being implemented with the assistance of About with Friends, NANSAs (Norfolk and Norwich SEND Association) and Opening Doors.

A final report from this project, which will report on data from across the county, will be published in May 2023.

## How we gathered people's views on this care home

We visited Phoenix House on 07/12/2022, and the visit was announced in advance, in order to minimise disruption to the residents. We spent around two hours talking to residents and staff, and observing life in the home on that morning, and examining the building and its facilities. We also interviewed a family member of one resident. In total, we spoke to three of the seven residents, and spoke to four staff, including the manager.

The visit team was:



Tony Edwards –  
Expert by  
Experience



John Spall –  
Enter and View  
Co-ordinator



Carol Edwards –  
Authorised  
Representative

## About Phoenix House

Phoenix House is a residential care home, run as an independent family business, rather than as part of a chain. Phoenix House began as a Shared Lives placement for three people with learning disabilities around 30 years ago. Shared Lives placements are where people in need of care go to live in someone's family home and are integrated into family life. The service was later expanded to be a care home for seven people, but has sought to maintain its original family ethos.

The most recent CQC inspection was carried out in January 2020, and the home was rated as 'Requires Improvement'.

# Summary

During this Enter and View visit we focused on what residents thought about their care, and the degree to which they were being listened to by the home staff. We considered the following themes, with the following findings:

- Voice, choice and personalisation: Care seemed to be well personalised at Phoenix House, through the good relations between staff and residents, which were often of very long standing. There was good ongoing consultation between staff and residents, who sought to operate in the manner of a family home wherever possible. The family member we spoke to was very happy with the care their relative was receiving at the home, and with their communications.
- Premises: Phoenix House is an older property, which is very clean and well-organised. Efforts have been made to keep the premises as homely as possible, and they do not seem at all institutional. People had opportunities to personalise their bedrooms and moved freely around the home.
- Activities: People went on regular outings and seemed to all be as active as they chose to be. A range of activities were available to residents, and all of the people we spoke to told us that they were happy with the choices they were offered.
- Relationships and community: The strong feeling of togetherness was very striking at Phoenix House, which seems to have successfully maintained its family-like relationships, first developed when it was established as a Shared Lives placement, before later becoming a residential care home. People were also encouraged to make outings in the local community and to maintain regular contacts with their families.
- Food and health: People were consulted on a daily basis about what they would like to eat, and people said they were happy with the choices they were offered. Everyone was active and a healthy weight, and were receiving regular medical check-ups.
- Relations with the broader health and social care system: These relations have been mixed. The West Norfolk Community Learning Disabilities Team have been very helpful for the home, and NCC's Integrated Quality Service have helped the manager to make important improvements. There have been some problems in the services provided by the local GP surgery, and some issues with the care provided for someone at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, although the latter were quickly resolved.

Overall, all of the people we spoke to at Phoenix House told us they were very happy living there. We observed a close, happy and lively community in the house, with the focus on having a family atmosphere really seeming to contribute to people's happiness.

# Findings

## Voice, choice and personalisation

More detail on the ways that the home takes people's views into account in specific areas are detailed in the sections below. In this section, we give some more general detail about how residents and their families were supported to take control of their care and their home.

### **Mechanisms for ensuring residents' voices were heard and responded to**

The manager of Phoenix House is keen to preserve the family ethos of the home, and the main 'mechanism' for listening to residents was therefore a standard part of family life: conversations around the meal table. There is a large dining table in the kitchen diner, big enough for everyone to sit around at mealtimes, if they want to. Mealtimes were partly used as an opportunity to talk about how people were getting on, what they would like to do in the coming week, and any problems they were having, or changes they would like to see. The manager explained that this was a good way of finding out what people wanted and encouraging collective decision making, without resorting to a more rigid and formalised meeting.

These meetings had been slightly hampered since the beginning of the Covid pandemic, because the staff all had to wear masks around the residents, and so were unable to eat with them. This made conversations less natural, because it feels less comfortable to have a dinner table conversation with someone who is not also eating with you. Nevertheless, the emphasis at Phoenix House was on quality relationships and flexible, ongoing communication.

The home also use care plans as a way of discussing people's plans and adjusting them where necessary, and the deputy manager was happy to show us some of these and talk us through them.

### **Responsiveness to family members**

The family member who we spoke to was very happy with the home's communication with them. The home would always get in touch with the family if their relative had any problems, or was feeling 'wobbly', and they are always helpful to the family. They are also happy for family members to get involved and to help the home out





I can't praise them highly enough, [my relative] is really happier, [they] really like it there.



- Relative

when necessary.

This family member was also happy with the care that their relative was receiving at Phoenix House, and with how responsive they were. They had allowed this person to move to a bedroom that they preferred, and had invested in making sure that they could continue to pursue their interests and hobbies after moving into Phoenix House. The friendliness and attention that staff have shown to this person has helped to make them much happier at Phoenix House than they were at a previous placement.

## Premises



Phoenix House is a converted village shop and bakery, and is an older property built some time in the 19th century. It is situated on the main street in Snettisham, a village near King's Lynn. When we visited, it was covered in Christmas decorations and lights and had a nativity scene set up outside, with a collection tin for a hospice. There were no outward signs that it is a care home, and local people who we asked for directions were not aware that it is a care home, which could facilitate community integration for the people who live there.

Inside, the house mostly has the appearance of an ordinary family home, with very few signs that it is a care home. Near the front door is a reception area with a table with benches on either side, and leading off from here is the kitchen-diner space. This is homely and pleasant, with a large dining table, big enough for all of the residents to sit around it at mealtimes. The kitchen is very tidy, but does have ornaments and crockery on the surfaces as you might see in anyone's kitchen area. It also has the old bakery's bread oven on one wall (though this is no longer used).

There is also a living room on the first floor, with sofas, a TV and a desk. There are cupboards with ornaments on the wall, and also many framed photos of the residents and artworks they have produced. There is also one bedroom on the ground floor, and to the rear there is a small yard with some garden furniture in. A section of the yard is covered with a glass roof, and there is a glass-walled room with sofas in it, for when people want to spend time outside in the winter

months. While the home does not have its own garden, there are green spaces nearby in the village for people to use, and the home rents an allotment space.

Up a narrow staircase are six bedrooms. The manager is changing the décor since she took over the running of the home from her parents. She explained that this needs to be done slowly, however, as several of the people living there would not welcome change that was too rapid. So ornaments are gradually being removed from cupboards on the landing.

Three people invited us to look at their bedrooms. These are all carpeted and have TVs, and are clean and bright. People have chosen their own colour schemes, and have personalised their rooms extensively. It is clear from the collections of objects that we see in their rooms that they are able to pursue their own interests.

The premises, then, are clean, tidy, well-organised and homely throughout, and are also suitable for the accessibility needs of all of the people living there.

## Activities

We saw several people going on outings during our visit, and most people seemed to go on regular outings. These included going for a walk in nearby green spaces, and going on trips to cafés and to local pubs. During the summer months there are also regular trips to a local swimming pool. Two residents are able to go out by themselves, and make trips on public transport into Kings Lynn. The home also puts an emphasis on family visits, which they see as essential to people's wellbeing.

While at home, there are craft activities for people to get involved in and people spend time watching TV and DVDs. Some people also clean their own rooms and make snacks. Those who are interested can also do gardening at the local allotment. One person told us that they like growing lettuces, leeks and tomatoes.

We also saw that the home were getting ready for Christmas together, and seemed to take the collective celebration of calendar events seriously.

# Relationships and community

## Between staff and residents

Staff and residents at Phoenix House seemed to have very close relationships. These seemed to be partly rooted in the home's origins as a Shared Lives placement (see 'About Phoenix House' above). The three people who had lived there longest had been there for around 30 years, and had known the current manager since she was a child, and also knew her parents, who used to run the home, well. One person who had arrived after the original three had also been there for decades. These long-standing relationships still seemed to be very important in creating the atmosphere of a normal family home, and to contribute to a strong feeling of togetherness.

The staff were very knowledgeable about the people living in the home, having accompanied several of them through a large portion of their life course. We saw them helping people to go about their day and to overcome the everyday challenges that they faced. This meant, for example, giving someone enough time to wake up from a nap (which for this person was a challenge), and waiting until they were ready to be gently encouraged to go on an arranged outing. This patient preparation helped this person to go out confidently and with enthusiasm.

Some people were happy to socialise confidently. One person's family member told us that one of the things that made their relative so happy at Phoenix House was that the staff were always around and happy to chat with them if they wanted someone to talk to. This was a big contrast with their former care home.

Other people needed some help and encouragement from staff, to be able to do this. One person for example, wanted to just stay in their room, including at mealtimes, when they arrived at Phoenix House. With patient encouragement, this person was now taking their meals on a table around the corner from the main dining table, and liked to hear the sounds of the other residents eating. They had also gained the confidence to go on outings with their preferred member of staff.

We also heard about how staff had been helping a newer resident, who did not have English as their first language, to settle happily in the home. They did this by encouraging regular visits by their family members, and taking them out on regular trips to a café where people spoke their first language. Staff were also learning phrases in this person's native language, and helping them to pick up more English phrases.

The manager spoke to us about the importance of protecting these strong

relationships by being careful about who to accept as a new resident. In particular, accepting a new resident with a higher level of care needs could bring in more funding, but not necessarily enough to support a new member of staff. This could therefore have the effect of taking staff time away from existing residents.

We spoke to a new staff member who had moved to Phoenix House five months before, having previously worked in elderly people's care homes. They were very happy with their new job, and had done eight training courses since they had arrived in the home, and felt confident they were receiving sufficient support. They were currently working towards their care certificate for looking after people with learning disabilities.

The home is fully staffed, and does not use agency or bank staff. The manager told us that this was important for maintaining good relationships and the family atmosphere. However, it did leave the home vulnerable to a Covid outbreak amongst staff, meaning that they were still all wearing masks at work.

## **Relations between residents**

All of the people we spoke to said that they were very happy living at Phoenix House, and the relationships amongst residents seemed to be central to that. Several of the residents had known each other for some decades and so knew each other very well. A relative that we spoke to mentioned that they were impressed by how people in the home intermingle and seem very happy in each other's company. As mentioned in other sections, we saw that the staff are keen to help people to participate as fully as they can in the life of the home, by helping them to be more confident to come out of their rooms and socialise with the group. They are also careful about who they will accept as a new resident, as they are keen to protect the positive group dynamic.

## **Relations between residents and the broader community**

As mentioned in the section on 'Activities', people at Phoenix House make regular outings in the local community. They regularly go for walks in the village, visit local cafés, and one person likes going to the pub. Two residents enjoy getting the bus into Kings Lynn. Some residents are more confident about going on outings than others, but we saw staff gently encouraging someone who was less confident to go out.

The staff told us, and a family member confirmed, that they see the maintenance of family relationships as central to people's wellbeing at Phoenix House, and make efforts to facilitate this.

## Food and health

The day's menu is decided on a daily basis by asking people what they would like to eat that day, and making the option that most people would like to eat. Alternatives are provided where someone does not like the main dish. The menu tends to include a sandwich lunch, with the hot meal being served in the evening, because people are often out and about during the day, and would therefore miss the hot meal if it was at lunchtime. None of the residents appeared to be overweight, and people seemed to be physically active, with everyone going on regular outings.

The manager told us that all of the residents have had their annual healthchecks, and have attended their hospital appointments when necessary. Accessing appropriate medical help has not always been straightforward, but the home staff have been persistent, with the help of the local learning disabilities team, in making sure that people get the treatment that is appropriate to their needs.

## Interactions with the broader health and social care system

Phoenix House has had a mixed experience of local health and social care services. They have drawn on the assistance of the West Norfolk Learning Disabilities team. This team has helped them to make sure that residents were properly cared for when they have been admitted to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kings Lynn, where staff have sometimes seemed to lack expertise in caring for people with learning disabilities. For example, one person was given the incorrect food for their condition, and their communication difficulties were not taken into account. The learning disabilities team went into the hospital to assist staff in caring better for patients with learning disabilities, and improvements were made quickly.

The home has also had good experiences with their local pharmacy, Alan Stockley & co, who have been excellent in supplying medication and advice, and have also mediated between the home and Heacham Group Practice. The manager told us that this practice mainly does online consultations, which the people living at Phoenix House struggle with. They also said that it has been difficult to get annual health checks done at the surgery, and required the intervention of the learning disabilities team to make this happen.

The manager told us that their dealings with Norfolk County Council (NCC) have been positive. However, they were concerned that the bandings system for providing funding according to each person's needs was not flexible enough to help them to cope with the rising cost of living. The funding provided under this system would not rise as utility bills rise. They also had a perception that they had less leverage with NCC as an independent provider, compared to a large chain that operates many services.

NCC's Integrated Quality Service has been helpful for the manager. They have been pleasant, but also honest in their advice as the former manager's daughter has taken over the running of the home. New paperwork systems have had to be built up almost from scratch, and the Quality Service's assistance has been instrumental in helping the home progress from 'Inadequate' to 'Requires Improvement'. They are hopeful that this process will leave them well-prepared for their next CQC inspection (which is the purpose of the Quality Service's advice).



# Recommendations

The visit team was impressed by the homely, family atmosphere staff had created at Phoenix House, which appeared to be central to the wellbeing of the people who live there. The residents all told us that they were happy, and seemed to lead active and fulfilling lives over which they had a good degree of control. We hope that the service will continue to put residents at the centre of their work.

## Service Provider Response

Good morning,

The report was amazing to read, thanks so much. I do not have anything to add.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Sheppard  
Registered Manager – Phoenix House



# healthwatch

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