

# My Views Matter: The Mallards care home King's Lynn



Healthwatch Norfolk visited The Mallards on 14/09/2022 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, NANSA (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 The Mallards on 14/09/2022, 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. In November, we had coffee and further conversations with two residents outside the home. In total, we spoke to six of the ten residents, and spoke to four staff, including the manager. Family members were invited to speak to us, but none chose to.

The visit team was:



Judith Sharpe -  
Deputy CEO



John Spall -  
Enter and View  
Co-ordinator



Fiona Tyas -  
Community  
Development  
Officer

## About The Mallards

The Mallards is a residential care home, set in a Victorian building on a residential street in King's Lynn. It specialises in looking after people with learning disabilities and there were ten people living there when we visited. Care has been provided there for over 20 years. The Mallards is part of the Care Tech Group, which operates around 550 residential homes and specialist services across the UK.

The most recent CQC inspection was carried out in 2018, and the home was rated as 'Good'.

# 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. All of the people we spoke to said that they were happy living at the Mallards, and did not make any complaints. We considered the following themes, with the following findings:

- **Voice choice and personalisation:** Regular one-to-one meetings were held between staff and residents, allowing the staff to stay up-to-date with people's preferences and to respond to them. They also encouraged people to try new things. There seemed to be a strong ethos of enabling people to be as independent as they could be.
- **Premises:** The main building was mostly neat, clean and well-maintained. It had three pleasant communal spaces, a large garden and an annex with three self-contained flats for those preferring to live more independently. There were some signs of personalisation through displays on the wall and bedroom doors, though personalisation of living spaces could perhaps be increased, and some displays were cluttered.
- **Activities:** People were very active, and were happy with the range of activities that they had to choose from. Most went on regular outings during the week, although this was limited in some cases by the amount of funding they received for staff support.
- **Relationships and community:** Relations between staff and the people living at the Mallards seemed to be respectful, caring and close. The staff seemed to know people very well, and to know how to keep them happy and to address any issues before they could escalate. This seemed to be very important for people's good quality of life and the personalisation of care. There was a good sense of togetherness between residents and they were regularly out in the local community participating in various activities.
- **Food and health:** People had a good selection of meals to choose from, and were regularly consulted about what they wanted to eat. People appeared to be in good general health, and were successfully encouraged to be physically active where possible. They also regularly underwent annual health checks and were assisted to attend hospital appointments when necessary.
- **Relations with the broader health and social care system:** The home has generally had a good relationship with Norfolk County Council (NCC) and local NHS services. However, there have been some problems accessing dental care for the residents, and some problems with communications with NCC's Integrated Quality Service.

Overall, the Mallards seemed to be a happy home, where people were cared for skillfully. People were able to lead full and contented lives, and had meaningful control over them.

# Findings

## Voice, choice and personalisation

In the remaining sections of the report we will discuss the various ways in which people at the Mallards were able to shape different areas of their lives. Here we discuss in more general terms how the home listened and responded to residents' voices.

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

The main way that residents' views were communicated to staff at the Mallards was through weekly one-to-one meetings. These seemed to be used to make decisions about regular schedules, in particular the weekly menu, activities and outings, and the chores and life skills activities that they were engaging in.

The quality of relationships between staff and residents seemed to be very good, and to facilitate less formalised, ongoing communication between staff and residents. Several people explained to us how they were able to pursue their interests with the support of staff, and staff also explained to us how they tried to introduce new possibilities to people to keep them trying new things.

No-one mentioned regular residents' meetings to us, and according to the last CQC report for the Mallards, none were being held. It may be that the home might want to introduce such meetings, which could help people to discuss problems that they have in common, and to increase the sense of togetherness in the home. The one-to-one meetings did seem to give people good opportunities to have their concerns heard, however.

Also, residents were involved in helping to run the home. Some people mentioned to us that they help with washing up and that they do their own laundry, and residents also had some input into how the home was decorated.



## Premises

As mentioned above, the Mallards is a 19th-century, semi-detached house in a residential street in King's Lynn. Behind the property there is a large garden, which also contains a smaller building with two flats in for independent living.

The main house is mostly tidy and well-maintained, and has a good amount of communal space. Towards the front of the building is a neat living room, with a television in a protective cabinet, two sofas and a coffee table with board games on the shelf. Towards the rear of the building is a sun lounge with a dining table and chairs, a light and pleasant space. Next to this is the kitchen, with signs on all of the cupboards saying what they contained, and named cupboards for each person living there. These rooms together provided sufficient communal space for all of the residents, but would struggle to accommodate them all at the same time. The manager's office is also on the ground floor, and residents seemed to feel free to come and go in this room, for example to fetch photographs to show us.

There are signs of personalisation in the communal areas, such as a large noticeboard in the hallway with photos of each of the residents on, and a photo for each person showing one of their favourite things. There is also a photo display on the living room wall showing a selection of activities that people have been doing in 2022. There was a photo of each person on their bedroom door, and a sign with their name on. There are also noticeboards around the house, though some of these seemed to be over-full with text-heavy documents, which might make them of limited use to the residents. We are told that all of the colours of the walls have been chosen by a resident at some point.

One person showed us their bedroom, in which they had chosen not have anything on the walls, but did have a number of personal possessions, recent purchases of things that they like to collect, and a television. There was also, as in all the other rooms, an ensuite wet-room. Another resident we spoke to had a television and games console in their room, and another had two coffee machines, due to their interest in coffee. This suggested to us that they felt at home in their rooms and were able to follow their own interests.

To the rear of the house is the garden, which has two flats in. These are in a more recently-built building, which has a small communal space and a kitchen downstairs, with two self-contained flats upstairs, which also have their own kitchens. The garden is large and pleasant, with fruit trees and flower beds, with views onto the playing fields behind. Some food crops were being grown by people in the beds, and they also have access to an allotment at a nearby home on the same road, run by the same manager. There is also a patio area with a table and chairs, where people told us they sometimes eat their meals.

## Activities

The staff at the Mallards seemed to keep the residents as active as they could. The number of activities each person could participate in was partly determined by the level of funding they received from Norfolk County Council. This affected how many hours of support they had for staff to take them on outings. Communal outings were organised every weekend, in which everyone could participate if they wanted to, regardless of funding. There were also house celebrations for important calendar events such as birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day and so on. People we spoke to were looking forward to Halloween celebrations and were keen to tell us about going to buy pumpkins, and about dressing up. They also showed us photos of previous Christmas celebrations and talked about decorating the house, and talked about some fundraising they had been doing for a local charity.

Those people who did have sufficient support went on regular outings, and these were decided in a weekly meeting that each person would have with their keyworker. Activities included going for walks; playing snooker, football and bowling; cycling; trips to cafés, restaurants, the cinema, the gym and banger racing; shopping; going to a day centre; going to Mencap's Gateway Club evenings and their beach hut in Hunstanton; and trips to visit relatives. One resident also had a job at a local supermarket, and some of the residents were due to go on a holiday at Butlins.

Some activities were also organised in the home, including DJ sessions, karaoke and baking, and people were encouraged to participate in the housework, and had these activities scheduled into their weekly planners. Overall, then, most of the people living at the Mallards had a wide range of activities they could participate in, and were regularly consulted about what they wanted to do.

# Relationships and community

## Between staff and residents

The interactions we observed between staff and residents were always respectful and caring, and often playful. Staff and residents were often joking with one another, and the residents we spoke to told us that they liked the staff, and talked about how nice they are. Residents told us that they had developed strong relationships with staff members. One person told us that the manager was like part of his family, and another spoke of how difficult it could be for them when a member of staff moved on.

Equally, the staff seemed to know residents well. People were consulted one-to-one by staff on a weekly basis about what they wanted to do and achieve that week. Staff were able to talk at length about people, their histories, likes and dislikes, and the everyday challenges they faced. Their knowledge was also apparent in how we saw them gently steering someone away from a painful conversation topic as they saw them becoming upset, and pre-empting a conflict between two residents before it could develop.

We also saw examples of staff taking care to maximise people's opportunities for independence, and helping people to develop more skills. Efforts were being made to develop residents' skills in areas such as money management, and various housekeeping tasks, and these were written into people's weekly schedules. Staff were also trying to increase people's confidence. For example the manager gently encouraged a resident to give us a tour of the house and to be confident enough to take us around the garden, whilst being careful not to push them too hard.

Staff seemed to take great care to prioritise people's independence, even when there were competing considerations. One person with a history of distressed behaviour, who was used to being restrained in a former placement, sometimes acted out with the expectation of being restrained. Staff explained to us how they would not restrain anyone at the Mallards, and were instead trying to help this person to understand the consequences of their actions and to respond accordingly.

All of the people we spoke to said that they were happy living at the Mallards, and no-one mentioned anything that they would like to change. One said that they would never want to leave, and one one said that it was "great".

## **Relations between residents**

Unlike most homes that we have visited in this project, there were no weekly residents' meetings to make collective decisions. Rather, decisions were taken on a one-to-one basis in consultation with staff. Nevertheless, there did seem to be a sense of togetherness in the home, as people were excited to show us photos of communal events in the home and to explain what happened at each event. Some people we spoke to reported enjoying living at the Mallards because people were 'nice', and some told us that they have friends amongst the other residents.

Staff seemed to understand relations between residents well enough to be able to pre-empt conflicts before they could develop. We saw one incident where someone started to become annoyed by another resident, but a staff member intervened quickly to stop the situation from escalating

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

Despite the limitations of funding it seemed apparent that most people managed to spend significant amounts of time out in the local community. Several residents made regular outings to local cafés and seemed happy asking the staff questions and keeping up to date with new offers and menus coming up and new branches opening. Other kinds of outings are detailed in the 'Activities' section above. People also made regular use of Mencap's local services, including the Gateway club evenings and trips to their beach hut in Old Hunstanton - this allowed residents to meet other local people with learning disabilities.

Some people were more independent and were able to leave the house by themselves, regularly going to a nearby shop to buy small items. One person had a regular job in a local supermarket, and another had formerly been volunteering in a local charity shop. Staff were trying to find this person a new place to volunteer.

In addition, most of the people we spoke to were able to see their families regularly, and were supported by staff to do so. Several people also told us that they regularly go on holidays.

## Food and health

Most people ate from a communal weekly menu. Each person was able to choose two of the dishes that would be on the menu for that week, and alternatives were offered to anyone who did not like a particular meal. In between meals residents were able to help themselves to fruit or snacks from the kitchen. The people who lived in the self-contained flats had more independence in terms of what they ate each week. They would go to the supermarket each week to do their own food shopping, and their menu would be developed from this.

People were gently encouraged to get regular exercise, and everyone seemed to be active, though some people were limited in this by physical conditions. Several people also spontaneously talked to us about the kind of exercise that they choose to do to stay healthy - so the encouragement seemed to be working well. One person liked to go out for long bike rides, and most of the residents had their own bike. Another liked going for walks, one liked playing football, and another enjoyed swimming and bodyweight exercises. One resident was proud of having lost four stone since they arrived, achieving a much healthier weight.

All of the residents have been undergoing their annual healthchecks with their GPs, and are supported by staff to attend any hospital visits they need to make. One resident also mentioned how pleased they were with the support that staff provided for their mental health, saying that they give them enough freedom to be happy, but not so much as to cause them anxiety.

## Interactions with the broader health and social care system

The manager told us that they have good relations with local GP surgeries. They were particularly happy with a learning disabilities specialist in one of the surgeries who had helped someone get over their fear of needles so that they could have their Covid vaccination, something this resident was very proud of. It has been more difficult to access dental care, however, except for emergency appointments. People were registered with dentists surgeries which have shut down, and none of the local surgeries are taking new patients.

Relations with NCC have also generally been good, although some problems arose during lockdown. The residents had a regular social worker who came in who they knew and liked, but during the pandemic this support became more fragmented. Meetings would be held remotely on Teams, often with people in Norwich who did not have as much local knowledge as the former social worker.

The manager also mentioned that NCC funding levels have been reducing over recent years, meaning that for some people they don't get all of the support that they feel they need. One person, for example, does not receive any funding for one-to-one support, because they are able to go out to the shops unaccompanied. However, they are not able to go to hospital appointments on their own, and so staff have to be creatively shuffled around to make this possible. The manager has been proactive in trying to secure increased funding for residents who need it, and has used an advocate to help to secure extra funding for two people.

The Mallards had a visit from NCC's Integrated Quality Service in February and overall had found the process useful. However, the home's input into the final report did not seem to have been taken into account, which the manager said had resulted in the home missing out on the chance to be rated 'Outstanding' rather than 'Good'.

# Recommendations

The visit team were impressed by the caring staff team and the extent to which people had control over their lives. Our main recommendations relate to the décor of the home. Some of the noticeboards seemed to be overloaded with text-heavy documents which would be difficult for most of the residents to understand. Perhaps these noticeboards could have fewer documents on, presented in an Easy Read format. In addition, some of the other homes we have visited showed more signs of personalisation in the décor, through having more photographs and artworks on the floor which are meaningful to residents, and giving them more control over how the home is decorated.

## Service Provider Response

No response was received from the home.



# healthwatch

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