

My Views Matter: Hill House Residential Home



Healthwatch Norfolk visited Hill House on 30/03/2023 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 – April 2023, our Enter and View visits were part of a project called 'My Views Matter'. This project was specifically focused on residential and in-patient care for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in Norfolk. We implemented 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 involved visiting 21 residential homes across Norfolk to find out what people with learning disabilities and autistic people, and their families, want from their residential care. It also investigated whether residents' and their families' views were being taken into account in how care is delivered. The 21 homes were 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 told us affect

the ability of homes to deliver personalized care effectively.

Alongside the Enter and View visits to homes, we also interviewed family members and professionals in the sector and organizing focus groups with care home residents outside their homes. The project was 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 reported on data gathered from across the county, was published in July 2023.

How we gathered people's views on this care home

We visited Hill House on 30/03/2023, 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 two family members of residents. In total, we were unable to communicate with the residents, however we spoke to two staff, including the manager.

The visit team was:



Tony Edwards -
Expert by
Experience



John Spall -
Enter and View
Co-ordinator



Fi Tyas -
Community
Development
Officer

About Hill House

Hill House is a residential care home in Pulham St Mary. It is a large building and has been open as a care home for over 30 years. At the time of our visit it housed seven people.

The home is currently run by Priory Adult Care who have over 230 residential and supported living services. Their services provide a range of specialist residential and supported living services for adults aged 18 years and over, including those with a Learning Disability or those who are autistic.

Hill House was last visited by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in November 2018 and was rated as 'Good'.

Summary

During this Enter and View visit we focused the degree to which residents and their relatives were being listened to by the home staff, and on how well-personalised people's care was. We considered the following themes, with the following findings:

- Voice choice and personalisation: People were listened to mainly through strong one-to-one relationships with key workers, through a mixture of communication methods. People were supported to make choices about their activities, food and the decoration of their home. Relatives told us that they felt well communicated with, and that they could raise any concerns if they needed to.
- Premises: The home was clean, accessible, well maintained and homely, with a pleasant garden. The communal areas were personalised with artwork and photos, and staff told us that people could choose how their rooms were decorated.
- Activities: There were a variety of activities on offer both inside and outside of the home. Activities were personalised and flexible, since residents often liked to change their minds.
- Relationships and community: Relatives told us that staff have good relationships with the residents, and they appeared to communicate well with them, and to know them well. Several of the staff had been at the home for many years which seemed to have helped build strong relationships. The residents spent time outside of the home such as at the local café and also had social events with people living in other Priory homes nearby.
- Food and health: Residents were supported to make choices about the meals they ate and choices appeared varied. Relatives told us that their family members enjoyed the food they were offered.
- Relations with the broader health and social care system: The home previously had difficulties with their local GP surgery but this had improved substantially after concerns were raised with the practice manager. Annual health checks had all happened recently and people were also up to date with annual reviews for residents with adult social services.

Overall, people at Hill House seemed to be listened to well by an established staff team with whom they appeared to have strong relationships. The premises were pleasant, accessible and well-personalised, and the relatives that we spoke to told us that their family members enjoyed living at the home, and that staff communicated with them well.

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



She looks at it as her home, if you know what I mean.

- Relative



Most of the people living at Hill House are non-speaking, and it therefore did not seem that a resident's meeting would be the most appropriate way to gather people's views in this home. People's views were gathered more through one-to-one interactions between them and their keyworkers. This could be through body language cues, picture cards, or using objects. It could also be through trial and error, such as trying different activities with people to see how they react to each one (see also the Service Provider's Response at the end of the report, which details some more methods they are now using to elicit people's views on their care).

As detailed in later sections, staff were able to explain in detail how they knew whether someone was happy, and what they were trying to communicate, and people were involved in choosing their activities and meals. The relatives we spoke to told us that they thought that their family members were listened to well, and had a good amount of control over their lives, and how the home was run, giving them a sense of ownership over the home.

Responsiveness to family members



Had we had a complaint, we would definitely let them know about it



- Relative

The manager told us that there was not much family involvement for several of the residents, with four of them having no contact with family at all because the family had declined contact. The two family members we were able to speak to were happy with their communications with the home, and felt that the manager would call them if there were any problems. One of the family members told us that they usually speak to the manager at least once a month, and that when there had been any problems in the past, the manager dealt with them proactively, and kept the family up to date with what was happening. The family members felt that if they had to raise something with the manager then it would be dealt with but did not tell us of any examples when this had happened because they were quite happy with the care at the home. They also told us that the home was very open to them visiting whenever they wanted to, as long as their relative was not on an outing.

Premises

Hill House is a large Victorian/Georgian building, with large windows, high ceilings and spacious rooms. It is on a quiet residential street in a rural village, with little through traffic. It has a high, old brick wall in front of it. There is not much sign that it is a care home from the front. It has a car park big enough for five to six cars and the minibus. There is a newer annex built on one side of the building, but this has been constructed in the same style as the main house.

There is an accessible ramp up to the front door. The main hallway is spacious. There are wooden floors throughout. The walls are all painted plain colours, though different in different rooms. There are lots of signs of personalisation on the walls - there are many artworks by residents and there are also photos of residents. There is a big display in the main hall, called 'What we have been up to', which looks like it is regularly updated.

None of the residents invited us to see their bedrooms during our visit. The manager told us that these were personalised. For example, one of the resident's favourite colours is pink and they like motorbikes, so they have a bright pink glitter wall in their room with shelves holding motorbikes on the wall. There is also a large picture of a motorbike on the wall outside this person's bedroom. Another person enjoys listening to music, so they have a CD player and lots of CDs in their room. The residents had their name written on their bedroom doors and some other doors such as cleaning cupboard had labels on, though these had no pictures on, only words.

The living room was large and pleasant, and had sofas and armchairs against the wall. It also had a TV in a cabinet, and shelves in the alcoves with books and musical instruments on. There were bird stencils on the walls.

The dining room has a large window that looks out into the garden. There is a TV in one corner, which had a music radio station playing on it during our visit. One wall was painted purple and had a large photo of purple flowers growing in a forest on it. There was a big table in here on which people were drawing, and a range of artworks made by the residents on the wall. It was a pleasant space, and the atmosphere was nice, too, with people apparently absorbed in their artwork and being supported by staff. The corridors were wide enough that there was plenty of space for people with mobility difficulties to get around.

There was a stairlift for people to get up to the first floor, and two of the bedrooms were on the first floor. There was a communal bathroom upstairs.

This had a normal bath and toilet inside, and a decent amount of space for people to get around.

In the hallway downstairs there are two noticeboards with some information about the CQC, health and safety, and how to make complaints - although the latter does not appear to be available in Easy Read format. The kitchen was locked, and residents are only allowed in there when staff are with them, and we were told that this was because none of them could cook safely with heat on their own. It was a good sized, home-style kitchen, with the week's menu displayed on the fridge. The hallway displays have been updated since our visit, and the communal areas have been redecorated, see 'Service Provider's Response' at the end of the report).

The garden was large and was split in two, by a fence with a large gate in it. It was a pleasant space, surrounded by trees, and with an old brick wall around the edge. There was plenty of seating on round, picnic-style benches on one side, enough so that the home can host social events with the residents from other Priory Group homes. On the other side of the garden was a large tree, and space to walk around. There was a line of fir trees on one side that the manager told us they are planning to have cut back, to let more light in.

There was also a barn, which the manager wanted to convert into an activity centre but was waiting to see if funding would be granted for this by the Priory Group chain.

Activities

The staff told us that there are a range of activities available at Hill House, and about how these activities are chosen. As mentioned above, staff use a range of ways of communicating with the residents to help them choose. One way is to present the choices 'directly' - where they show them the tools for an activity, or take them to a place where the activity is done. They also use photos, although people sometimes struggle to connect the picture with the concrete activity. The activity schedule is flexible, and is agreed on an individual basis, because people often change their minds, and/or have some trouble thinking too far ahead.

Staff told us that the residents get out at least every other day, and usually more, and that they have a car and van available for outings. Some people like to go out to eat at cafes, some just like to go for a drive, one goes to McDonalds, another goes horse-riding every week. Other outings included going to the coast, a garden centre, shopping, to the cinema and out for a meal or a 'girly afternoon'. They have also had theatre trips in the past.

They also have activities in the house. Every other week an organisation comes in to do crafting with them. There are also dedicated activities staff in the chain who come in to do a range of activities with people. Staff also told us that they are looking into arranging a holiday for one of the residents to spend some time nearer to their family, who are a four and a half hours' drive away.

The relatives we spoke to told us that they were very happy with the choice of activities that their family members took part in. One person told us that their family member was very vocal about what they wanted to do, and that staff were good at responding to their requests.

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He does like a trip out to the, the cafe for a coffee and a cake [...] he enjoys that sort of trip out and I know they do that with him regularly.

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- Relative

Relationships and community

Between staff and residents

During our visit we see residents coming and going freely about the house, including into the managers office, and making demands of staff in a way that suggested a sense of ownership of the home, and an expectation that requests would be taken seriously and responded to positively. Staff interacted with residents in a patient, kind and affectionate way. When somebody wanted to get up and move to another room, staff were very quick to make sure that they were able to get out of their chair and to move safely. We heard from staff how occasionally one of the residents gets agitated and they could tell us in detail what the warning signs were, and how to help this person to calm down.

One of the family members we spoke to praised the carer of their relative, telling us that they have been supporting their relative for several years and gives them a lot of attention. The keyworker and other staff knows this person's personal sign language style, and seem to understand what they want or need.

The home was currently fully staffed, and had not used any agency staff since January 2023. Some of the staff had been there for over 10 years, and most of the rest had been there for at least three years.

Relations between residents

The residents appeared to get on well and to be comfortable in each other's company. We heard from staff how some people had been there for more than thirty years, others have been here for around 10 to 15 years, and two residents arrived together shortly before the COVID lockdown began. One of the family members told us how their relative had known a lot of the residents in the home for many years, and got on with them well, helped by the stability of relationships.

Relations between residents and the broader community

As mentioned in the 'Activities' section, we heard about how people often got out and about in the local community. For example, we heard how they regularly visited the local café in the village. There were also regular social events with the residents of other Priory homes in the area. They would regularly go to have a garden party in the garden of another home, and then the residents from that other home would make a reciprocal visit to their garden. This meant that people's social circle was wider than just the other people living in Hill House.

Food and health

Staff told us that they use picture cards to help people to choose what food they will eat. Staff have to have some input into this, because people may choose something which is not suitable for them, for example because they will not be able to swallow it. However, everyone was consulted about food, and staff construct a menu that suits everyone. The relatives we spoke to told us that their family members seem to like the food they are offered.

The week's menus we saw included main courses and desserts, lunch and dinner. The menu was varied with a mixture of meat, fish and vegetarian meals with vegetables. Breakfast was offered to people when they woke up, as they all tended to wake up at different times. There is a choice of toast, cereals, juice, coffee. While we were visiting, people were offered drinks and a snack of crisps.

Staff told us that none of the residents had the capacity to safely do any food preparation that involves cooking over heat, but they did get involved in doing things like making tea and sandwiches, or making cake mixture before it went in the oven.

The relatives we spoke to told us that the home had always promptly sought medical treatment for their family member when they needed it, and kept them up to date with their condition.

Interactions with the broader health and social care system

The home had recently managed to resolve some concerns with Pulham Surgery, where the residents were registered. In the past there had been some communication problems, but the manager sent the surgery a list of concerns and met with the Practice Manager and had since been impressed with their service. The home now has a weekly time slot when the surgery will send someone into the home every week to see the residents, if the home needs them to. All of the residents had recently done their annual health checks.

They have had some support from the South Norfolk Learning Disabilities team, in particular for Speech and Language Therapy, and have found them to be really responsive and helpful.

There were only two people funded by Norfolk County Council in this home when we visited. The manager told us that the support levels were sufficient to provide the support that these residents needed. Annual reviews with social workers had happened quite regularly, and the manager thought that the process worked well.

Recommendations

Overall, people at Hill House seemed to be listened to well by an established staff team with whom they appeared to have strong relationships. The premises were pleasant, accessible and well-personalised, and the relatives that we spoke to told us that their family members enjoyed living at the home, and that staff communicated with them well.

The only recommendations we would make are that the door from the dining room to the garden could be dampened somehow, as the noise of it banging seemed to annoy one of the residents. Also, there could perhaps be some more Easy Read information posted on the walls of the home, including details of the complaints procedure.

Service Provider Response

Dear Healthwatch Norfolk,

I have read through the report and think that it is a good reflection of the service.

There has been more work to help the environment since your visit. We have decorated all of the common areas and halls to different colours which has really improved the feel and also adding additional boards to the main hallway. We have 'Meet the Staff Team', 'Meet the Resident', and 'How I'm Feeling Today' themed pictures for each resident to do, 'What We Have Been Up To' and also an Easy Read section for resident, staff and visitors.

The door near the kitchen at the rear of the house has had the latch fixed and also a door hold for when it's summer so that it can remain open without banging. In the next two months we are also having a new ramp and railing fitted to enter the garden to allow residents more independence to safely access the garden by themselves.

Kind regards,
Paul Reeder
Registered Homes Manager
Priory – Hill House



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