

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees report
on provision of services for adults
with learning disabilities

April 2018



Introduction

Local Healthwatches have been set up across England to create a strong, independent consumer champion with the aim to:

- Strengthen the collective voice of citizens and communities in influencing local health and social care services to better meet their needs.
- Support people to find the right health and social care services for them by providing appropriate information, advice and signposting.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees (HWS) works with local people, patients, service users, carers, community groups, organisations, service providers and commissioners to get the best out of local health and social care services. This doesn't just mean improving services today but influencing and shaping services to meet the needs of the local communities tomorrow.

HWS is steered by a Board of volunteers, commissioned by the Local Authority and accountable to the public. HWS are the only non-statutory body whose sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak-out on their behalf.

Healthwatch has:

- The statutory right to be listened to; Providers and Commissioners must respond to Healthwatch within 20 days of submission of requests for information or reports.
- The statutory power to Enter & View publicly funded health and social care services.
- A statutory seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Rationale

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council have been running a day option service for adults with learning disabilities which commenced five years ago. Changes to the provision of these services have occurred over the last two years following an internal review.

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees liaised with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council after receiving public feedback around these changes to the provision for adults with learning disabilities. Healthwatch were keen to find out what current provision had been put in place.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council welcomed the opportunity for Healthwatch to visit their newly refurbished Day Options facilities at Allensway Centre and Stockton Business Centre which delivers community-based learning disability day services to support adults with learning disabilities in the community.



Methodology

Healthwatch staff visited Allensway and Stockton Business Centre on Thursday 12th April 2018 and were shown around the facilities by the Council's Service Manager and the Development Manager for the services.

During the visit Healthwatch staff:

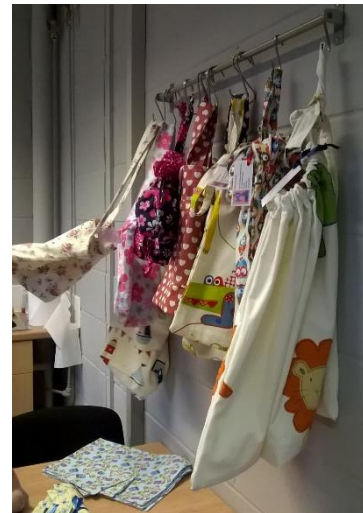
- Observed all the newly refurbished facilities
- Observed sessions being delivered for adults with learning disabilities
- Were shown demonstrations of the new state of the art equipment by the team
- Gathered feedback from key staff members

Observations at Stockton Business Centre

Refurbished facilities are now housed together on the first floor of the Business Centre. This ensures smooth running of the service and optimal safety for all staff and service users. Previously the staff had worked without adequate office rooms, furniture and equipment. It was felt that the previous facilities were not to the standard required; the working environment for staff is now pleasant and calm with all facilities being refurbished to accommodate appropriate storage and lockers for service users.

Healthwatch observed service users making a variety of stained glass objects including keyrings, ornaments and coasters. Healthwatch also observed a craft activity class and sewing session. The service users appeared to be thoroughly enjoying these activities in a calm and safe environment.

A wider programme (STEPS) supports people with learning disabilities into other activities and they have set up a range of enterprises including a confidential waste and training company as well as a sports academy. At the Business Centre there is a conference suite which is set up with interactive white boards and is used for development of the service users.



Observations at Allensway Centre

The centre was built in the 1980's and recently renovated to cater for service users with complex needs and learning disabilities.



Healthwatch staff observed the canteen facility at the end of the day when service users were waiting for transport to take them home. Healthwatch staff felt that it was a very quiet, relaxed and safe environment. There were large projected images on the wall of dolphins, fish and other calming scenes which Healthwatch staff noted had a calming influence on service users.

Healthwatch staff also observed a large trampoline at the centre which is used to provide rebound therapy for service users. There is also a snug and break away rooms as well as outside space with a summer house.

The interactive learning centre at Allensway has rooms which project images onto the walls to create a relaxed scenic atmosphere in which clients partake in a range of activities such as music and Makaton. There is also a conference suite at Allensway Centre.



Continuous Development of the Service

Further improvements to the service include Tovertafel projectors which are due to be installed at both Allensway Centre and Stockton Business Centre. This relatively new invention projects life-like images onto any table which service users can then interact with. This projector has been found to improve social interaction, mobility and cognitive function.



Staff Feedback

‘To the clients it has made such a positive difference, lots of activities they can engage in with the correct equipment’

‘There is growing number of people who require adult social care services but with the same or less funding’

‘Staff are skilled and staff resource is good’

Feedback from Service Manager

The opportunity to develop day option services for people with learning disabilities following the wider review of the services has led to considerable change in the way we are able to support the service users. We now have a national award winning service which both people with learning disabilities and staff find improves their abilities. We are able to offer appropriate, safe and varied support to people requiring a range of day time options.

Conclusion

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees were informed that there were approximately 130 service users based in the community, 50 service users at Allensway Centre and all are supported by 100 staff members.

The staff have improved job satisfaction following the newly refurbished service as they can now see the huge difference it is making to the service users. The service delivery and monitoring of service users is regularly reviewed to ensure that each individual is getting the best from the service. Some service users can learn and progress to move forward e.g. from centre based to being out in the community.

The main focus is to ensure that all those who attend Allensway Centre and the community services have 'their best day'. Healthwatch staff feel that this is being evidenced following their visits to the services and observing service users who were positively engaging in their activities.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank the Service Manager and Development Manager for inviting us and for taking the time to show us around the improved services. We would also like to thank the service centre staff for their feedback during our visit.

