



Report

Eaton Court

December 2020

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What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch NEL is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. HWNEL exist to make sure that people are at the heart of care. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. HWNEL share their views with those with the power to make change happen. Helping people find the information they need about services in their area is another of our priorities. HWNEL have the power to make sure that people's voices are heard by the government and those running services. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, HWNEL also encourage local health and social care services to involve people in decisions that affect them. Our sole purpose is to help make care and services better for people.

In summary, Healthwatch's main aims are to:

- Help people find out about local care
- Listen to what people think of services
- Help improve the quality of services by letting those running services and the government know what people want from care
- Encourage people running services to involve people in changes to care

What is Virtual Engagement?

Every local area in England has a Healthwatch, which is the independent consumer champion for Health and Social care. Our purpose is to listen to the views and experiences of people who use local services, especially the most vulnerable. We make sure these views are heard by those who plan and deliver services, so you can get the best out of them.

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Hull and East Riding have come together to develop the Healthwatch Humber virtual care home engagement project to understand the experiences of residents, families, friends and carers in care homes across the Humber region.

We know that in order to keep people safe during the Covid -19 Pandemic, care homes have had to make changes, and some very difficult decisions.

We want to understand what impact this has had on -

- Residents living in a care home
- Family and friends
- Staff working in a care home

We want to celebrate what has worked well and help care homes to improve on areas that haven't been quite as positive.

Overview/Background

Eaton Court Care Home is situated in Grimsby, North East Lincolnshire and offers a range of services and provides 24-hour residential and nursing care for residents aged over 65 and up to 2 residents under 65 who have End of Life or Older Person's needs. Eaton Court Care Home is part of the Orchard Care Homes Group.

The CQC (Care Quality Commission) gave an overall rating of Good following their last inspection.

The home is set across two floors and all of the 43 rooms are en-suite and "decorated to high standards". Residents are encouraged to personalise their rooms with their own furnishings and pictures to create a home-from-home. The home also benefits from an enclosed garden.

Eaton Court Care Home has an Activity Coordinator who creates a daily programme of events to support the individual interests and hobbies of residents, including reminiscence sessions.

Methodology

Eaton Court Care Home was sent an email invitation, inviting them to be involved in the project and the Manager Anne Ruttle accepted. A date for the project to start was confirmed and information was sent to Eaton Court Care Home. A social media campaign was started by Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire and social media posts were shared by Eaton Court Care Home.

Staff and friends and family of residents were given the opportunity to either speak to us directly or complete the online surveys. The registered Manager Anne, due to unforeseen circumstances, completed a survey about her experiences for herself, staff and residents during the covid-19 pandemic.

Interview with the Manager

Due to unforeseen circumstances, HWNEL were unable to gain an opportunity to speak directly to the Manager of Eaton Court- Anne Ruttle. However, Anne completed a survey to provide us with the information we had requested.

Anne, who has only been in post at Eaton Court since April 2019, told us that the care home had a business continuity plan which has been adapted frequently throughout the pandemic as needed. Anne told HWNEL, "**We went into complete lockdown**", as she explained that

residents were confined to their bedrooms, visiting was disallowed and temperature checks were carried out on anyone who had to enter the building eg: professionals.

“We introduced masks and taught the staff how to wear them and spent a lot of time discussing infection control techniques.”

Anne added that Eaton Court were one of the first in the area to do so, which did not come without challenges.

“GP’s had to prioritise Covid at the time and this caused us some frustration if seeking support for other things” and “Ambulance crews worked to different infection control processes and didn’t understand they needed to follow ours on site.”

Anne also explained that the Care Home were in regular communication with District Nurses as the nursing staff took over duties.

Eaton Court is part of Orchard Care Homes, who Anne explained set up regular communications with her and the team with group emails and conference calls. Anne told HWNEL that there was also a ‘Covid Committee’ and a dedicated Covid information email that all staff had access to for any information.

“They updated us regularly, ensured we had all the information and equipment we needed and setup a regular PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] supply.”

However, Anne told HWNEL that there was a delay in communications with the Local Authority at the start of the lockdown.

“The Local Authority were about two weeks behind but now we have regular calls with them too.”

We were told that restrictions were communicated to residents and relatives via **“email, telephone calls, letters, facebook and one to one chats”**. Anne told HWNEL that the residents and relatives were **“amazing”** and helped where they could.

“They supported us and understood why we were doing what we were doing.”

Visiting was reinstated during the late summer, which was initially facilitated within a gazebo for outdoor visits. However, Anne explained the care home now have a ‘visiting pod’ in one of their lounge areas.

We asked how visiting is currently being managed in line with current restrictions.

“Pod visiting only, one nominated visitor per resident for a fortnightly visit. If we have any gaps in the Pod planned visits we let relatives know and they can book in an extra visit. Any resident not able to access the Pod has one nominated visit to their own room per fortnight. End of life residents have a half hour visit daily and we facilitate relatives staying with their loved one during their final hours if at all possible. All visitors complete

Health Declaration forms and have their temperature taken and all wear PPE during their visits. The Pod is cleaned between each visits and all touch points are cleaned following any in home visits.”

Anne told HWNEL that her main concern is introducing Covid-19 or any other infection to the home. Despite Anne reporting mixed messages regarding guidance for visiting, the Care Home are undertaking extensive risk assessments on an ongoing basis, and they are ensuring staff, residents and relatives are involved and aware of any changes made.

“Staff are invested in continuing to keep everyone safe.”

HWNEL asked what impact the restrictions have had on the health and wellbeing of residents. Anne told us that when residents were isolated in their own rooms there was an increase in falls, weight loss and pressure ulcers. Anne explained there was also a decline in the mental health of residents, and so the Care Home now ensure that residents socialize in bubbles, have access to all areas of the home and encourage contact with loved ones where possible but they have encountered some challenges with this.

“Many elderly residents have struggled with video calling and understanding the technology.”

Anne told us that the staff have also had to learn a lot of new processes and technology very quickly, as well as struggling to finding the time to ensure that residents have as many calls as they would like.

“We continue to have a very busy care home but we need to meet these additional needs. The majority of our residents need a staff member with them while they are on any video calls and this impacts the amount of time we can dedicate to them.”

Anne continued to explain the challenges that this extra demand for facilitating contact with family has had upon the staff team, and told us that occasionally they have had to remind relatives that devices cannot possibly be manned at all times. Despite the challenges, Anne told HWNEL that they are thankful for the technology they have access to as she said it has made a huge difference to the residents.

“The joy of watching family members reconnect virtually is amazing and we have embraced the new technologies available to us.”

Anne told us that usual care home activities have ‘partially’ continued since March. The Care Home typically get out quite frequently, and outings have been missed by the residents and staff alike. Activities such as competitive bingo have continued, along with other activities such as arts and crafts and gardening. The residents have also received letters from the local college and some residents have gained pen pals.

“We’ve loved, we’ve laughed, we’ve cried, we’ve celebrated, we’ve been scared and we’ve supported each other. We’ve lived.”

When HWNEL asked if the residents had access to all of their usual health care services when needed, Anne told us that they had, despite initial challenges. Anne explained that they found it very difficult to access any form of GP service, but says this has now gradually improved.

“If it wasn’t Covid-19 they really were not interested.”

Access is facilitated virtually via phone calls, internal and external visits as necessary subject to risk assessment. HWNEL were told that some residents had accessed the hospital during the pandemic, but were tested for covid-19 before being discharged back to the Care Home. However, Anne told us they experienced some issues ensuring that residents were tested prior to discharge back to the care home, but explained this has also now improved.

“We kept them in isolation in their own rooms with staff using full PPE for two weeks after their discharge regardless of their result.”

HWNEL asked what could be done to improve the discharge process.

“Communication has been difficult at times especially when being asked to accept new residents to the Home. We have not been able to do pre-admission assessments and have had to rely on Hospital Discharge Team information, this has varied hugely in the information provided with some assessments being sent through that are 2 years old. I have delayed admissions and refused some where I did not feel that I was given enough information to decide if I could meet their needs. Funding has also been an issue, initially many were discharged from the Local Hospital as "Covid" Funded, this was unclear if it was Nursing or Residential and has led to several funding issues further down the line where it was found that we were not being paid the level of funding we anticipated. This now seems to be happening again with people being discharged under "Discharge to Assess" funding, again there are no clear definitions about whether this is to a Nursing or Residential bed.”

HWNEL were told that since the beginning of the pandemic, the Care Home have had only four cases of Covid-19, all of which have been amongst staff, and there has been no cases amongst residents. Anne stated this is due to really good infection control techniques, which are proving to be effective thus far as there has not been an outbreak within the Care Home. Staff and residents are undergoing routine testing on a weekly basis. Additionally, some staff have been tested for antibodies and all have been negative. Those staff who have received a positive test result isolate for two weeks on usual pay. Anne explains she contacts them regularly to talk through any concerns they have and to ensure they understand any paperwork they need to complete.

Communication

The Care Home stated that initially their communication required improvement, but they have identified the issues and found ways to ensure everyone is up to date and kept informed.

“We have started a monthly update that is sent out from named nurse or senior to relatives, we also call if there are any changes or email those that live abroad.”

Anne explained that there is currently, and has always been, just one point of contact per resident which is explained during the admission process. However, the care home state they appreciate and understand sometimes this can be an issue when there are complex family dynamics and if necessary, the care home can contact more than one person upon request.

Staff Wellbeing

HWNEL were told that staff have all had ‘peaks and troughs’ throughout the pandemic, and Anne says the team have pulled through by talking and supporting each other.

“This pandemic has continued far longer than anyone could have thought, staff not only have work, but they have ongoing personal issues too.”

Anne explained they have tried to support each other and encourage conversation, and they have given access to helplines or other resources as needed. The most valuable support during the pandemic, Anne says, has been “being in it together”. Anne described managing a Care Home through these challenging times as, “difficult, hard, scary and emotional at times”, and explained that this has proved to her that she is a capable manager.

“If I can manage a home through this pandemic, I can do it even better afterwards!”

The Care Home have even found some practices that they would like to continue following the pandemic, such as virtual meetings which save time by eliminating travel and finding new ways of ‘keeping in touch’. Anne also told us of the excellent team spirit within the Care Home, which she hopes will continue.

“Nationally, I would like to think that care homes will continue to be recognized for the good work that we do rather than the odd negative story”

What did relatives say?

HWNEL had the opportunity to hear from three relatives, who’s loved ones had lived in Eaton Court Care Home between 2-8 years and all of whom we were told have ongoing health issues. The relatives told us they would usually visit with varying regularity, from 5 days a week before the pandemic to monthly. Unfortunately due to Covid-19, visiting was disallowed in March. The relatives say this was communicated to them via email. When we asked relatives how they felt about not being able to visit, they told us it was, “**terribly sad**”, “**like she had died**” and “**very upsetting**”. However, all relatives told us they have been able to maintain some form of contact with their loved one throughout the pandemic mainly through video calls, and some with a messenger service. Relatives told us that video calls has to be requested but did not report any issues or restrictions.

Some relatives did suggest that a portable tablet would have improved this, as they state it was sometimes difficult using a phone. Another relative told us that as they are a grandchild, they were only able to see their grandparent if they were in the company of their parent, and suggested the following.

“Employ staff to assist residents with maintaining contact, instead of current staff having to do so on top of their usual tasks.”

All of the relatives that we heard from told us that they were regularly updated, and their level of concern for their loved one ranged ‘from not at all’ to ‘very’.

“The staff are amazing it’s a very well run home.”

“I am aware they were taking as many precautions as possible to keep her safe.”

HWNEL found that no relatives had concerns about their loved one’s care and all are satisfied with the care that their loved one has received during the pandemic.

“My Mum-in-Law has gained weight and is always happy when we speak to her. Very content.”

“They have become our loved ones relatives as well as paid carers.”

Relatives reiterated what the Care Home Manager had told us, saying that their loved ones were always offered a wide variety of activities and had access to all that they needed.

Overall, it is evident that relatives are happy with the care their loved ones are receiving. It is also evident that the level of communication is effective, and the efforts of the staff are greatly appreciated by relatives.

Conclusion

Most importantly, HWNEL would like to take this opportunity to praise the Eaton Court Care Home Manager, staff, residents and relatives for their resilience and hard work. It is evident that they have effectively adapted to the challenges they have faced throughout the pandemic by continually identifying issues through reflection, and listening to their resident’s and their loved ones and working to overcome those challenges as a team.

Eaton Court put into place a rigorous and thorough risk assessment process as early as possible which has ensured the safety and wellbeing of the residents. They faced opposition and challenges with this, but maintained their strict procedures so as to keep residents’ and team safety as their sole concern. They have continually adapted to any issues that have arisen. During the first lockdown, the Care Home identified that their communication required improvement, and that residents’ mental health was declining. The care home acted upon this, and put procedures into place to safely but effectively overcome these issues and improve residents’ wellbeing. They have been innovative and creative, offering a wide range of activities such as gardening, crafting and writing letters, to try to maintain

'routine', in line with their objective to **“ensure that all the residents at Eaton Court live a life that is enriched and purposeful”**.

Recommendations

- Manager to investigate if support could be offered to provide volunteers to enable more video calling support to residents
- Eaton Court Care Home to continue with the 'pen pal' scheme in the future to enable residents to stay connected with the community
- Eaton Court Care Home to share their learning from the pandemic with NELCCG

Care Home Managers Response

Anne Ruttie, Eaton Court Care Home sent us an update:

As an update we do now have a volunteer working with us to support with messaging and video calling, she is part of our testing programme alongside the staff team. She is also a relative so is able to see her mother on the days she is in the Home which is lovely for them both

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Anne Ruttie, Eaton Court Care Home Manager, the staff team, and loved ones of residents at Eaton Court for working with us on this project.

Distribution

This report has been distributed to the following:

- Healthwatch England
- Caroline Barley (Contracts manager for HWNEL)
- Marie Oxley (Quality Programme Officer CCG)
- Jan Haxby (Director of Quality & Nursing NELCCG)
- John Berry (Quality Lead NELCCG)
- www.healthwatchnortheastlincolnshire.co.uk