

Abbots Care Limited

Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire)

Inspection report

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14 October 2019
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Ratings

Overall rating for this service

Outstanding 

Is the service safe?

Good 

Is the service effective?

Good 

Is the service caring?

Good 

Is the service responsive?

Outstanding 

Is the service well-led?

Outstanding 

Summary of findings

Overall summary

About the service

Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) is a large domiciliary care agency which provides personal care and other support related services in Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and North London. This inspection covered the services provided in Hertfordshire. The diverse range of services provided means that a large number of people were supported with the regulated activity of personal care. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 648 people who received personal care with a total of 10,000 hours provided per week.

The agency provides a wide range of services which include, domiciliary care; flexi care scheme; live in services; specialist care from home services, parent support and supported living, and a rapid response service.

Not everyone who used the service received personal care. CQC only inspects where people receive personal care. This is help with tasks related to personal hygiene and eating. Where they do we also consider any wider social care provided.

People's experience of using this service and what we found

People told us they felt safe being cared for by staff from Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire). Robust safeguarding systems and processes were in place and people were kept safe from harm. Staff demonstrated they knew the process to follow if they were concerned about people's safety or if people may be at risk of abuse.

People had their individual risks assessed and, where risks were identified, measures were put in place to reduce the risk of harm. People's medicines were managed safely, and people received their medicines as prescribed. Staff were aware of how to reduce the risk of the spread of infection and were provided with personal protective equipment, where appropriate.

Staff received an induction, ongoing training and supervision and felt well supported by the provider. People received the support they needed to eat and drink sufficient quantities, when identified as required. Support was provided to access healthcare professionals and people were supported to maintain their health and well-being. Consent to care had been obtained from people, and staff were aware of people's rights in relation to offering choices.

People were supported to have maximum choice and control of their lives and staff supported them in the least restrictive way possible and in their best interests; the policies and systems in the service supported this practice.

The provider and staff were exceptionally responsive to the needs of people who used the service, by providing a wide range of person-centred support and activities in line with people's wishes. Staff supported

people to live as full a life as possible. There were strong community links and social initiatives that people were supported to access regularly; supported by staff and volunteers.

People told us they felt the staff were caring and thoughtful. Feedback from relatives was positive. People's dignity was maintained and people's right to privacy was respected. Personal information was stored securely to ensure it remained confidential.

People's needs were fully assessed before they started using the service. Care plans were developed and kept under regular review to ensure information remained current. People were encouraged and supported to participate in a range of innovative and diverse events organised by the provider and supported to follow hobbies that were of interest to them.

People and their relatives were aware of how to raise concerns should the need arise. Many compliments had also been received by the service. People were asked their views and feedback obtained was analysed so that any shortfalls could be addressed, and positive experiences shared with the staff team.

The provider had developed an excellent working relationship with commissioners and local authorities from their catchment area to develop new services in response to the needs of people in the community. Commissioners and representatives from the local authority were extremely positive in their feedback about the services provided by Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire). They told us, "Abbots Care are a key strategic partner of HCC and they overwhelmingly deliver local authority funded business and their new charity to deliver additional opportunities for people shows a real love for the people they interact with and the staff willingly participate."

There was a positive, open and empowering culture. Feedback about the leadership and management of the service was overwhelmingly positive. Systems were in place to help staff keep safe while lone working. The provider was dedicated to promoting a positive, inclusive culture at the service. Quality monitoring processes were robust, and these clearly evidenced the action taken to continually improve the service. In a recent contract monitoring visit the provider achieved an 'Excellent' overall rating.

For more details, please see the full report which is on the CQC website at www.cqc.org.uk

Rating at last inspection

The last rating for this service was Good (published 14 April 2017).

Why we inspected

This was a planned inspection based on the previous rating.

Follow up

We will continue to monitor information we receive about the service until we return to visit as per our re-inspection programme. If we receive any concerning information we may inspect sooner.

The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Is the service safe?

The service was safe.

Details are in our safe findings below.

Good ●

Is the service effective?

The service was effective.

Details are in our Effective findings below.

Good ●

Is the service caring?

The service was caring.

Details are in our Caring findings below.

Good ●

Is the service responsive?

The service was exceptionally responsive

Details are in our Responsive findings below.

Outstanding ☆

Is the service well-led?

The service was exceptionally well led.

Details are in our Well Led findings below.

Outstanding ☆

Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire)

Detailed findings

Background to this inspection

The inspection

We carried out this inspection under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (the Act) as part of our regulatory functions. We checked whether the provider was meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Act. We looked at the overall quality of the service and provided a rating for the service under the Care Act 2014.

Inspection team

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors, two assistant inspectors and four Experts by Experience. An Expert by Experience is a person who has personal experience of using or caring for someone who uses this type of care service.

Service and service type

This service is a domiciliary care agency. It provides personal care to people living in their own houses and flats and specialist housing. This service also provided care and support to people living in 'supported living' settings, so that they can live as independently as possible. People's care and housing are provided under separate contractual agreements. CQC does not regulate premises used for supported living; this inspection looked at people's personal care and support.

The service had a manager registered with the Care Quality Commission, who was also the provider. This means that they are legally responsible for how the service is run and for the quality and safety of the care provided.

Notice of inspection

We gave the service 48 hours' notice of the inspection. This was because we needed to be sure that the provider would be available at the office to support the inspection.

Inspection activity started on 14 October 2019 and ended on 17 February 2020. We visited the office location on 14, 21, 28 October 2019 and on 12 and 16 December 2019. We carried out home visits on 21 January 2020. The Experts by Experience made telephone calls to people and relatives for feedback about the service between 17 and 22 October 2019. Between 25 November 2019 and 29 November 2019, we contacted health and social care professionals working in partnership with the service and requested further evidence from the provider.

What we did before the inspection

We reviewed information we had received about the service since the last inspection. The provider was not asked to complete a provider information return prior to this inspection. This is information we require providers to send us to give some key information about the service, what the service does well and improvements they plan to make. We took this into account when we inspected the service and made the judgements in this report. We used all this information to help plan our inspection.

During the inspection

We spoke with 82 people who used the service and 21 relatives about their experience of the care provided. We spoke with 19 members of staff, and the provider.

We looked at records relating to people's care, staff recruitment files and training. We looked at other records relating to the overall management of the service, including quality assurance and audits, staff support meeting minutes, and social events information.

After the inspection

We continued to seek clarification from the provider to validate evidence found.

Is the service safe?

Our findings

Safe – this means we looked for evidence that people were protected from abuse and avoidable harm.

At the last inspection this key question was rated as Good. At this inspection this key question has remained the same. This meant people were safe and protected from avoidable harm.

Systems and processes to safeguard people from the risk of abuse

- People told us that they felt safe being supported by the staff from Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire). One person told us, "I am happy with the safety aspect of the service. The staff all wear name badges which helps me to know who they all are, and they always call out to let me know they are coming in." A relative told us, "All the staff that come and visit my [family member] I trust and feel confident that they will keep [name] safe. It gives me peace of mind when I cannot be there to know that they are safe living in their own home with staff that we can trust to do a good job."
- People were supported by staff who had been trained in how to identify possible abuse. Staff demonstrated they knew how to raise concerns. One staff member told us, "We are constantly tested and re-trained in safeguarding, so we always know the latest procedure and what to do if we have a safeguarding concern." Another staff member told us, "Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and is the action of making a person safe. This may involve removing a person from harm, preventing access by a perpetrator or providing a safe environment. Adult safeguarding means to work with an individual to protect their right to live in safety, free from abuse, harm and neglect." A relative told us, "I keep a close eye on the staff when they come to bath my (name) and listen out in case I hear anything untoward or if the carers are not being kind or doing things that are not safe to do so."
- The provider's safeguarding policy guided staff on how to raise referrals to the local authority safeguarding team.

Assessing risk, safety monitoring and management

- People had individual risks assessed and, where any issues or concerns were identified, measures were put in place to reduce the risk of a reoccurrence. Information was provided to help staff care for people safely.
- Staff had received training in the safe use of equipment and told us that they always shadowed and observed more experienced staff using equipment before they were able to use the equipment themselves.
- Environmental risk assessments were carried out in people's homes to help ensure it was a safe area to provide care.

Staffing and recruitment

- People, relatives and staff told us they felt there were enough staff available to meet people's needs safely. One person told us, "I cannot fault them. I am very happy with the care given." Another person we spoke with told us "I am happy staff arrive on time as I like my routine." One relative told us "Yes it's very good."

They are always very punctual, reliable and we always have the two carers twice a day to help with (name)."

- People told us that if staff were running late due to being delayed at the previous visit they were usually notified. One staff member told us, "If someone we are looking after becomes unwell and needs urgent medical help, we call emergency services and stay with them until they arrive. We also call the office, so they can cover the next visits, so people aren't let down." There is a designated 'Alerts' team who monitor and respond to any calls that are running over 15 minutes late. The team then contacts both the carer and service user to check if the visit has taken place. If necessary, a replacement carer or a community manager will be sent out to ensure the scheduled visit is carried out."

- The provider completed a range of pre-employment checks as part of the recruitment process to help make informed recruitment decisions. This included taking up references and a DBS. Where appropriate, people who used the service were invited to participate in the recruitment process.

Using medicines safely

- People received their medicines as prescribed. We saw that medicine administration records were completed. One person told us, "My medicines come in blister packs and they sign it off once I've taken it."
- Staff received training and the provider completed checks to make sure they remained competent and followed good practice.
- Senior staff completed spot checks in the persons home and audited records to ensure medicines were being administered correctly.

Preventing and controlling infection

- People were protected from the risk and spread of infection through training and effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as disposable gloves, aprons and foot covers.

Learning lessons when things go wrong

- Accidents and incidents were recorded and reviewed, and appropriate actions taken as a result.
- The provider was pro-active in using information from audits, complaints, incidents and safeguarding alerts to improve the service. The provider worked with staff to understand how things went wrong, involved them in finding solutions and make changes to help prevent a similar incident happening in the future.

Is the service effective?

Our findings

Effective – this means we looked for evidence that people's care, treatment and support achieved good outcomes and promoted a good quality of life, based on best available evidence.

At the last inspection this key question was rated as Good. At this inspection this key question has remained the same. This meant people's outcomes were consistently good, and people's feedback confirmed this.

Assessing people's needs and choices; delivering care in line with standards, guidance and the law

- People had their needs fully assessed before they began using the service. Information from the assessment was used to develop their personalised care plans. One relative told us, "They asked lots of questions to make sure they got all the information they needed."
- Care plans were reviewed regularly and when people's needs changed which helped to ensure that the care and support provided remained current and up to date.

Staff support: induction, training, skills and experience

- People were cared for by staff who had the appropriate skills, training and experience to meet their needs effectively.
- All new staff completed induction training which included a 'person-centred' handbook. The induction also incorporated the Care Certificate and is approved by the Hertfordshire Care Providers Association (HCPA). All new staff were shadowed and monitored in the community by senior staff members.
- Staff had received training in moving and handling, safe administration of medicines, infection control, emergency first aid, safeguarding, privacy and dignity, equality and diversity and health and safety training. We also saw evidence of specialist training that had been provided where necessary. This included training in relation to specific conditions such as Parkinson's disease and epilepsy, Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy (PEG) training, stoma care and catheter care training.
- All senior care staff held a Level 3 Health and Social Care qualification or above. The management team had a wealth of experience and qualifications in the field of health and social care. This meant that the provider strived to ensure that the whole workforce had the skills and abilities to provide a high standard of care and support to people who required their services. The provider also had 'champions' trained in Dementia, End of Life care and Nutrition. These staff used their expertise and knowledge to provide additional support and training to all staff.
- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) trainers are approved by the HCPA to deliver the Care Certificate training.
- Staff received individual supervision and told us they were well supported by management team. One staff member said, "I feel well supported and I can talk to the manager whenever I need to. They are very helpful for example, if I need to change my rota, they are very accommodating."

Supporting people to eat and drink enough to maintain a balanced diet

- People, where required, were supported with tasks associated with eating and drinking. Staff were aware of the referral process for additional support for example; if a person needed to be referred to the speech and language therapy team (SALT) for issues with their eating and drinking, such as difficulty in swallowing.

- Where people were supported with eating and drinking, staff were aware of people's likes, dislikes and any known allergies. Staff were aware of any cultural needs or special dietary requirements.
- The service provide training in nutrition to all staff as part of both their induction and their ongoing mandatory training. The provider told us that part of this training focuses on the benefits to overall health and wellbeing. They told us they encourage staff to support people to eat nutritious food and drinking plenty of fluids. The nurse trainer employed at the service had developed a recipe book for staff to use in order to support people with quick and nutritious ideas for meals and snacks. The information has been produced in a format that can be accessed on the staff mobile phones.

Staff working with other agencies to provide consistent, effective, timely care; Supporting people to live healthier lives, access healthcare services and support

- People were supported where required to access a range of healthcare professionals. The management team and staff had developed good working relationships with other organisations and services which helped provide joined up care for people.
- Professionals told us they were happy with the service provided by Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) staff. One professional told us, "Abbots Care are creative in providing solutions to resolve complex care requirements and make themselves available for support and escalation where problems do exist." Another professional told us, "Where issues do arise, they seek to resolve and learn from concerns quickly, keeping the focus of their work on the individual."

Is the service caring?

Our findings

Caring – this means we looked for evidence that the service involved people and treated them with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect.

At the last inspection this key question was rated as Good. At this inspection this key question has remained the same. This meant people were supported and treated with dignity and respect; and involved as partners in their care.

Ensuring people are well treated and supported; respecting equality and diversity

- We found that there continued to be a caring and friendly atmosphere between staff and people who used the service. People and their relatives were generally very positive about the staff and the care they received. One person told us, "I am happy with the service and the support I get from Abbots Care." Another person told us, "Lovely people look after me. They chat with me and listen to what I have to say. They are kind and caring, always." A third person told us, "The staff the staff are gentle and kind, I think I am very lucky with the staff who come here."
- People received consistent care and support from a team of staff who supported and treated them well. People's positive feedback demonstrated they felt staff treated them as individuals. One person told us, "I'm extremely pleased with the service and would recommend it. My main carer is 'dynamite'. The timekeeping's fine and everything works really well so I've got no complaints. I feel very well looked after. I just have to ask, and they'll do it which gives me confidence and helps me to live independently."
- Staff were aware of equality and diversity and had received training in this topic which helped ensure they treated people appropriately and did not make any assumptions about people.

Supporting people to express their views and be involved in making decisions about their care

- People told us the staff were kind and caring and that they always felt consulted and involved. One person told us, "They are so very respectful, I can't fault them. They look after me in a caring and loving way just as my family would if they could." A relative told us, "I have always found the carers that come to be both kind and very caring, no worries there and if I had any concerns, I would speak to the carer directly."
- People told us they and where appropriate, their relatives were fully involved in the assessment process and were also invited to join the regular review of their care plan. One relative told us, "[name] always invites us to any of the meetings that they think are important or relevant but to be honest we always have regular contact with the staff and office staff so feel we are fully involved and know what is going on with [name]."
- Care plans were written with the person and people had signed their care plan to indicate they agreed with what had been written. This ensured that staff had the information in place to know how to support people in the way they preferred.

Respecting and promoting people's privacy, dignity and independence

- People told us the staff were very respectful; maintained their privacy and promoted their dignity.
- Staff told us how they supported people to retain their independence by encouraging and supporting

people to do as much as they could for themselves. One person told us "Yes. I couldn't live independently without them. They are so very respectful, I can't fault them."

- A relative told us, "I am often around when the carers come to see [name] so I see everything that goes on and I have always had the upmost respect for the carers, and they afford the same respect to my [name]. One carer told me they look after [name] in the same way as they would their own relative. I felt very reassured by this." One staff member told us, "I always make sure I close the door and cover the person up. I speak with person throughout and explain what I am doing. I always get them to do as much as they can even if it's just giving them the flannel to help wash themselves."

Is the service responsive?

Our findings

Responsive – this means we looked for evidence that the service met people's needs.

At the last inspection this key question was rated as Good. At this inspection this key question has improved to Outstanding. This meant services were tailored to meet the needs of individuals and delivered to ensure flexibility, choice and continuity of care.

Planning personalised care to ensure people have choice and control and to meet their needs and preferences

- People using the service had an individualised plan of care, drawn up with them and based on an assessment of their needs. Plans were reviewed regularly, and people told us staff from the office came out and checked their care was being given the way they wanted it to be. The provider used a live information technology (IT) system to develop and update each person's plan of care. These updates were then immediately shown on the care workers mobile devices. This enabled the service to respond immediately to any changes in the persons care needs and helped ensure continuity of care. We received positive feedback from an outside professional who told us "I am reliant on a responsive, creative and high-quality services to meet the demands around timely hospital discharge. Abbots Care have worked with me and my teams to deliver this over recent years and have been critical to our improvement in performance."
- As part of the initial assessment process, the provider identified and matched care workers with the interests and personality traits of the person being supported. For example, a young person with complex needs required a service who's interests included swimming and sensory activities. The provider matched this young person with a care worker who had previously been both a children's entertainer and swimming instructor. This carer had also been trained in techniques to deescalate behaviours that may challenge. The feedback from both the parent and the social worker was extremely positive and stated that this care worker provided an invaluable support to both the young person and the family. The provider said "[name] goes above and beyond for [person] and if any issues arise will always stay longer than the allocated call time to support the family."
- We found several exemplars where the provider had demonstrated their ability to be very effective in responding promptly and swiftly to people's individual needs and had enhanced the lives of the people they supported. For example, when the service received a referral for a service user who was in hospital and had bariatric needs and required six care workers to support their manual handling. The discharge team couldn't find a service to provide their specialist care and therefore the person had to remain in hospital where their physical and mental wellbeing deteriorated. Abbots care worked with the Hertfordshire County Council and the lead occupational therapist in conjunction with the advice from the 'back-exchange team' and compiled a robust risk assessment and arranged a discharge plan for this person. They continue to work with the lead occupational therapist and now carry out some of the care with four members of the team. This meant the person has now been enabled to do some of the care tasks semi independently.
- Another example where the provider demonstrated a prompt and effective response was when a person's house had been broken into and their relative had been badly beaten. The care worker arrived just after this

had happened and called for the police and ambulance. The care worker stayed with this person, helped them with their statement, made sure they were safe and stayed with them until the provider found alternative housing arrangements for them. The care worker kept the on-call team updated constantly. The provider also arranged for this service user to receive double ups care calls for their emotional support and wellbeing. The provider also supported the person user to move to an alternative place of safety.

- Furthermore, the provider had responded very effectively when a community manager had identified some serious concerns that had affected a persons' wellbeing in relation to difficulties in managing their finances and paying their household bills. The person had some communication difficulties which meant they were unable to resolve these issues effectively over the phone, without support. The community manager therefore allocated 3 additional days support in order for a member of staff to support them in making phone calls and to assist them with these unresolved issues. The support the staff member provided included, arranging to have the persons boiler fixed and met with the engineers at the person's home in order to explain the issues. A stairlift to be installed privately to assist the person with their mobility. They also contacted. They also arranged for full assessments to be carried out with the falls team, a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist in order to support the person with maintaining their independence and mobility. And finally, they contacted Age UK to arrange for someone to assist this person with their housework. The impact from providing this additional emotional and practical support meant the person's anxiety was greatly reduced and their health and wellbeing improved immensely.

Meeting people's communication needs

Since 2016 onwards all organisations that provide publicly funded adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard (AIS). The standard was introduced to make sure people are given information in a way they can understand. The standard applies to all people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss and in some circumstances to their carers.

- The provider told us information could be provided in other formats, if required, and in alternative languages. The provider told us, "We teach our care workers how to communicate with the individual person through a range of techniques which include sign language, pictures and symbols and assisted technology devices." They went on to explain, "We have supported people who have a degree of cognitive impairment to set reminders via their Alexa devices to take medication, to remind people about their mealtimes and when to take their food out of the fridge and also the devices are set up to tell the person the time." iPads were also used to assist people with communication by means of pictorial information.

Supporting people to develop and maintain relationships to avoid social isolation

- People and their relatives felt the service and staff helped them to avoid isolation. The provider had arranged many social events at the office for people to attend mornings.
- People told us that staff encouraged them to follow hobbies and things that were of interest to them.
- 'Abbots Friends' was an initiative created in 2019 as a result of the service identifying the most vulnerable service users, those who lived alone and those people who don't have a close network of family to provide additional support. Volunteers supported people in the Hertfordshire community with a friendship and companionship service. The 'Abbots Friends' mission is to tackle the growing plight of isolation and loneliness and to help improve the health, confidence and resilience of vulnerable people. We joined one of the weekly tea parties as part of the inspection process and spoke with some of the attendees. One person told us, "This group is a lifeline to me, the volunteers are angels and bring some sunshine into my life, which at times can be very lonely." Another person told us, "This service is exceptional in its kindness to people like me who have no family or friends living close by. I don't know what I would do without events like this to come along to. They even come and collect you."
- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) works in partnership with social enterprises within the local

community to further support people from becoming isolated, for example, by providing a knit and natter and sewing club.

- People we spoke with were all extremely positive about the opportunities they were given in relation to the social and leisure opportunities that the provider offered. One relative told us, "They take [name] out to library, swimming, shopping and into town to the cafés etc [name] looks forward to it. They are very reliable and a lifeline to me and my family." Another relative told us, "The life of [name] has been improved immensely with the volunteer's group and they all bring sunshine into all our lives and also give us carers a well-earned break."

- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) also supported people to gain work and paid employment opportunities. For example, people who live with a learning disability were offered work experience within the service and, as a result, four people had been successfully appointed into permanent jobs. One person joined Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) as a volunteer in 2018. With the support and encouragement from the provider, they went on to complete a college course, with work experience, as an events planner. They were a key contributor in organising the providers summer party in June 2019. The provider stated that this event was a "great success which enabled people who used the service and other members of the local community to spend a day celebrating with friends and families." Due to their successful achievements the person was nominated by the provider for a Hertfordshire 'Young Achiever Award.'

- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) had a learning and development team which also ran a free dementia workshop and hub events for people who use the service and their families. The last hub event was a tea dance. Staff dressed in 1940's clothes and offered a reminiscence activity using music and photos from bygone years. The service also invited families into a small training session they organised to provide ideas and suggestions on how to support their family member who was living with dementia. These workshops also provided information on other organisations that families could contact for further advice and support. These workshops also gave relatives an opportunity to meet and socialise other carers and to share their experiences.

- We reviewed several examples of how much people appreciated this service. One person stated, "I wanted to thank you and your team for all the hard work and dedication that you put in making people's lives better, for all the support and patience that you showed me and for having such a kind heart in a world too busy to care for others. I am so happy that I've met you. Thank you."

- During the weeks prior to the Christmas break, the provider identified the most vulnerable people within the community who used their service and who would be alone during the Christmas holiday. The team arranged and delivered 65 presents to these service users across the county of Hertfordshire.

- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) have also created an additional service called 'Pop in for a cuppa' where senior staff members are assigned 'pop in' visits to people who are isolated or whose relatives and friends do not live locally, to simply visit them for a social chat and provide some company.

Improving care quality in response to complaints or concerns.

- The service had a dedicated team of staff who managed all complaints. We found this process was both robust and effective in managing complaints. One relative told us, "I have no complaints. I would tell the lady in the office. If I do phone the office the staff are always polite and as I said I have no complaints."

- People knew how to raise concerns and were confident action would be taken to resolve any problems. Although two people we spoke had raised a formal complaint, both complainants indicated that when they contacted the office their complaint it had been received with courtesy and efficiency and resulted in a positive outcome from their perspective.

- The service had received many compliments, thank you cards and letters from people and their relatives, clearly demonstrating their satisfaction and gratitude for all that the service offered and achieved. One person told us, "I have recently written to the agency to thank them for the support they have given me."

End of life care and support

- The provider discussed people's end of life wishes to help ensure that all staff knew in advance how they could best support people and their families. For example, if people preferred to remain at home and receive care from staff who knew them well and were able to fulfil their final wishes in familiar surroundings.
- At the time of the inspection the service was supporting two people with palliative care. One person had been receiving palliative care from the service since 2016 and was supported by a regular and experienced team of carers. Feedback from their family confirmed that they were very happy with support that was received and stated, "Thank you to all the care workers for the high standard of care that is delivered."
- Training was provided for all staff, which ensured they fully understood end of life care and how best to support people. The service also had a 'champion' trained in end of life care whose expertise and knowledge was used to provide additional information, advice and training to all staff. One member of staff told us, "The training has given me great knowledge and strategies in my role to ensure that I can deliver good end of life care to my service users."

Is the service well-led?

Our findings

Well-Led – this means we looked for evidence that service leadership, management and governance assured high-quality, person-centred care; supported learning and innovation; and promoted an open, fair culture.

At the last inspection this key question was rated as Outstanding. At this inspection this key question remained the same. This meant service leadership was exceptional and distinctive. Leaders and the service culture they created drove and improved high-quality, person-centred care.

Promoting a positive culture that is person-centred, open, inclusive and empowering, which achieves good outcomes for people

- The provider operated an open, inclusive culture which achieved positive outcomes for people who used the service. Staff were also positive about the overall management of the service.
- Relatives told us they felt the service had a person-centred culture. One person told us, "I am very happy with the care I get." Another relative told us, "I would recommend it (service) because the staff that care for [name] are passionate, professional and very caring."
- The service's outstanding responsiveness is a credit to the distinctive leadership and the commitment from the whole staff team. The service has created innovative projects to help improve and enhance the lives and the wellbeing of people who use the service,
- There continued to be a strong emphasis on continually striving to improve the services provided to people. Innovative systems were continuously trialled and implemented in order to provide a high-quality service. The provider was committed to continuous development in learning and development. Since the last inspection a new initiative had been created which identified a number of 'rising stars' amongst the senior staff team and, from this, a leadership academy was set up to support four new managers to have a monthly training session to work towards the level 4 qualification in Health and Social Care.
- In addition to this, a leadership and management trainer was selected to run monthly training sessions for twelve aspiring managers. Training sessions included time management, transactional analysis and customer service. One member of staff told us, "I have been able to develop my knowledge and skill base beyond my expectations by being offered this opportunity by [Name] which meant a lot to me and I am determined not to let them down."
- There was also a very effective mentoring scheme in place for all newly appointed staff provided by the senior staff team. This support was provided for the duration of the shadowing period. One staff member told us, "I felt very supported when I was doing my induction and it was invaluable to have a specific person that I knew was there to give me advice, support and guidance. I think this gave me more confidence when I was finally assessed as being competent to work on my own."

Managers and staff being clear about their roles, and understanding quality performance, risks and regulatory requirements

- The provider had an effective and robust quality assurance model which enabled them to closely monitor the quality of the services they provided to people. There were audits completed daily and monthly by care staff and managers of different departments. These audits included spot checks for care staff, auditing care plans, checking medicines, staff competencies and safeguarding referrals. The provider used a trend

analysis model to review any incident, accidents or safeguarding alerts in order to further improve the service and to maintain health and wellbeing.

- A robust procedure was in place to ensure the smooth running of the service which helped ensure all care visits were closely monitored and carried out within the agreed timescales. The provider had a robust and effective system in place to monitor late or missed calls. The service had a dedicated alerts team who were responsible for monitoring all calls between 7 a.m. and 22.30 p.m. 7 days a week. There was also an on-call duty team for out of hours emergencies between outside of these times. Alerts were assigned to each visit with a high, medium or low priority based on the needs of the individual person. Visual updates on the rostering system were automatically updated in order to have a 'live' overview of all visits. There was also a team of senior care workers who provided cover for sickness or annual leave. This meant that people would receive consistency of care from staff who were familiar to them. The effectiveness of this monitoring system had led to a very effective deployment and management of staffing resources across all the services. There were 644,910 care visits carried out between April 2019 to March 2020 with 96% of these visits completed on time. The remaining 4% of calls that were later than scheduled were due to care staff needing to remain with people in cases where they had become unwell during the visit or to cover any unforeseen emergencies.
- A recent initiative that had been introduced by the provider to assist with the smooth and effective running of the service was the purchase of 26 cars across the service. This was as a result of the provider identifying difficulties in recruiting care workers who had vehicle's that were suitable to take people out to access their community activities. This facility has enabled care workers to pick people up in order to accompany them to appointments and also support them to attend a variety of social events within the local community.
- There was a clear management structure in place and a strong framework of accountability amongst the senior office team. Each member of the senior staff team had defined responsibilities which were reviewed by the provider to ensure effective performance management. For example, the rostering and care planning systems in place automatically alerted senior staff when reviews, observations, supervisions and training required updating.
- The provider and senior office team used an electronic care record system to monitor the service effectively. If any part of a person's care plan was due for a review, the relevant manager would be alerted, and they would take action to address it.
- Policies and procedures were in place to aid the smooth running of the service, including safeguarding, whistleblowing, complaints and equality and diversity. Staff had access to a 'staff guide' on their mobile phones, which allowed them to view key documents and guidance to support them in their role.

How the provider understands and acts on the duty of candour, which is their legal responsibility to be open and honest with people when something goes wrong.

- The provider demonstrated they knew their responsibilities under duty of candour and notified the CQC of incidents that they were legally obliged to.
- Staff were able to demonstrate they understood the importance of their roles and responsibilities. They were able to tell us the type of thing that would require reporting; for example, accidents or incidents or a medicine error. This supported the 'open' transparent culture found at the service.
- People and relatives told us they felt the provider was very approachable and available. They told us they felt that the service was well managed. One relative told us, "The manager is very passionate about the care of all vulnerable people and has been in the caring business for many years and this experience shows in the way they deliver the care to people, I cannot fault them."

Engaging and involving people using the service, the public and staff, fully considering their equality characteristics; Continuous learning and improving care

- People and staff were encouraged to contribute their views on an ongoing basis, informally and through a

range of systems. This included a communications group compiled of office staff, care workers and a representative from people who use the service in order to review the service provided and ways in which it could further improve.

- Staff confirmed that they were encouraged to make suggestions to improve the care and support provided. One staff member told us, "I always try and bring new ideas to my supervisions with my manager. We have a bit of banter sometimes as I can be a bit unrealistic about what I want to achieve with the funds available, but they are always encouraging and supportive."
- A new initiative had been introduced which enabled all staff to have a voice and an involvement in the service. This took the form of a care workers annual conference. This forum gave all staff the opportunity to explore and discuss additional training they would like, recognise the achievements of individual care workers which included individual awards and gratuities and also provided information on specific care issues.
- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) are part of a lead provider group who meet regularly with HCC and NHS colleagues to discuss performance and quality.
- Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) were 'Innovative Employer' Finalists at the annual HCPA Awards in 2019 for the work they have done to support one person to co-produce a series of free social events.
- There was a strong emphasis on continuous improvement and the provider was driven to achieve an excellent service through reflective practice. For example, staff supervisions and observations were allocated regularly with a focus on a specific area of care. This was closely monitored by senior managers which helped ensure staff worked safely and displayed a respectful attitude.
- The provider had memberships to key organisations in the care sector and received important information and updates. This helped to ensure they stayed up to date with best practice and guidance.

Working in partnership with others

- The service had worked hard to develop excellent relationships with outside agencies to improve care outcomes for people. We received a range of very positive feedback from health and social professionals which demonstrated an open and collaborative approach to improve people's care experience. For example, a representative from the local authority told us "Abbots' Care work with our local NHS commissioners and providers to improve the interfaces for people and the integration of health and care. [provider] and the team have attended a number of difficult meetings to educate NHS colleagues about the realities and positive side of adult social care and have been willing to pilot new initiatives within their current contact, by agreement. Along with planned changes to pathways in our specialist care at home offer to link with the NHS frailty initiatives, Abbots have trialled a Better Care Fund initiative to offer social care workers in an acute hospital ward in Watford."
- Another example where the provider has worked extremely successfully in conjunction with an outside agency was when Hertfordshire County Council Commissioners relied upon the professionalism and expertise of Abbots care to assist in the re provisioning of care from another service provider. They told us "Abbots are relied on by the Council as a safe pair of hands during such transfers and have been instrumental to the safety of service users. The Managing Director has also provided individual support to smaller spot providers experiencing performance issues and mentored Registered Managers."
- Another testimonial provided by a leading professional from the local authority stated, "Hertfordshire County Council enjoys a very mature commissioning / provider relationship with Abbots which I would summarise as committed, trusted and seeking innovation." "As the company have expanded, the quality of their service delivery continues to be of the highest quality and we see a real investment in their staff and passion for the people they provide care and support for."
- It was evident that the service had developed an excellent track record of delivering individual and personalised care, which provided people with upmost confidence in the service. Many people we spoke to told us they would not hesitate to recommend Abbots Care Limited (Hertfordshire) to their friends and

family.