

Dorset County Council

Dorset County Council - Shared Lives Scheme

Inspection report

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Date of inspection visit: 12 August 2014
Date of publication: 04/11/2014

Ratings

Overall rating for this service

Good 

Is the service safe?

Good 

Is the service effective?

Good 

Is the service caring?

Good 

Is the service responsive?

Good 

Is the service well-led?

Good 

Overall summary

We carried out this announced inspection under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 as part of our regulatory functions. This inspection was planned to check whether the provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and to pilot a new inspection process being introduced by CQC which looks at the overall quality of the service.

The scheme was last inspected on the 30 August 2013. No concerns were raised with the care and support provided to people at the inspection.

The shared lives scheme provides care and support to people in a family situation. Shared lives carers share their family and community life with someone who needs

Summary of findings

support to live independently. Dorset County Council Shared Lives Scheme offers personal care to people on a short term basis as well as long term placements for any adults over the age of 18.

The scheme had a team of seven staff who were employed by Dorset County Council. Shared lives carers worked on a self-employed basis and supported people within the carers' home.

There was a registered manager for the service. A registered manager is a person who has registered with the Care Quality Commission to manage the service and has the legal responsibility for meeting the requirements of the law; as does the provider.

The scheme was well led by the registered manager who was committed to providing a high quality service which was personalised to the people who used it.

People were cared for as part of a family unit and were involved in all family occasions and events. One person told us "I feel very at home with my carer." A relative said "It's just like having a whole new extended family. We couldn't be happier with how it has all worked out."

Everyone we asked about the scheme told us it provided a service that was personalised to each individual. Comments included: "The scheme treats everyone as an individual and with the respect they deserve" and "It is all personalised to them. There is a mutual respect and they have a lot of fun as well."

People using the scheme and their representatives were involved in all aspects of the assessment process to make sure they were matched to shared lives carers who were able to respond to their needs and preferences. One relative told us: "You just couldn't get a more personal service. They do everything they possibly can to find the right placement."

Shared lives staff and carers received training that was appropriate to the scheme and the specific needs of the people they cared for. One shared lives carer told us they had been matched with a person who had mental health needs and the scheme had provided specific training in this.

Risks of abuse to people were minimised because of the rigorous approval process in place for shared lives carers. One member of staff told us: "The process can take up to a year. People we work with are very vulnerable and we need to make sure they will be safe."

There were enough staff to safely support the scheme. Shared lives carers said they were always able to contact a member of staff if they had any concerns or needed support. One shared lives carer told us: "My allocated worker visits regularly and I know they are always at the end of the phone if I need them."

Summary of findings

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. The provider had systems in place to make sure people were protected from abuse and avoidable harm.

There were risk assessments to make sure people were able to take part in activities and develop their skills with minimum risk to themselves and others.

Staff and shared lives carers had received training in safeguarding vulnerable adults and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 which ensured that people's legal rights were protected. Appropriate steps were taken when someone lacked the capacity to make a decision for themselves.

Good



Is the service effective?

The service was effective. People received effective care and support which met their needs and took account of their wishes.

There was an excellent matching process which ensured that people using the scheme were supported by carers who shared their interests and had the skills to meet their needs.

Staff and shared lives carers received on-going training to make sure they had the skills and knowledge to effectively support the people who used the scheme.

Good



Is the service caring?

The service was caring. People were supported by workers and shared lives carers who were kind and caring. People felt part of a family and were involved in all family activities.

People's privacy and dignity were respected and they were supported to maintain and develop independent living skills.

People and/or their representatives were involved in all decisions about their care and support provided by the shared lives scheme.

Good



Is the service responsive?

The service was responsive. People received a service which was personalised to the individual and responsive to changes in need or wishes.

The scheme provided flexibility to make sure people's needs were met in a way that supported them and their families. People were encouraged and enabled to maintain contact with friends and family and to take part in community activities.

People knew how to make a complaint and felt that any concerns would be listened to and action would be taken to address any issues raised.

Good



Is the service well-led?

The service was well led. There was a registered manager and staff team who had a shared vision of providing a very personalised service and making on-going improvements to the scheme.

There was an open and transparent system for the approval of applicants to become shared lives carers.

Good



Summary of findings

Staff and shared lives carers were well supported and there was good communication. Feedback from people using the scheme, shared lives carers and staff was listened to and acted upon where appropriate.

Dorset County Council – Shared Lives Scheme

Detailed findings

Background to this inspection

This inspection was carried out by one inspector. The scheme was given 48 hours notice of the inspection. We visited the service on 12 August 2014. At the time of the inspection there were 92 people using the service. This included people who received support from a shared lives carer on a short term basis and 39 people who were living with shared lives carers on a long term basis.

We reviewed the Provider Information Record (PIR) and previous inspection reports before the inspection. The PIR is a form that asks the provider to give some information about the service, what the service does well and improvements they plan to make. We also reviewed the information we held about the service. At our last inspection in August 2013 we did not identify any concerns with the care provided to people who used the service.

Before the inspection we received completed questionnaires from 29 people who used the service, 15 shared lives carers, five members of staff and five health and social care professionals. Some of the findings and comments from these surveys have been used in this report.

During the inspection we met with four people who used the service and six shared lives carers. We also met with all seven staff at the scheme and the registered manager. We spoke with three relatives and four shared lives carers on the phone. We also spoke with two independent members of the Dorset County Council – Shared Lives Panel. This panel monitors the quality of the service provided and is responsible for the approval of all new shared lives carers.

As part of the inspection we read records which related to the running of the service and records relating to people's individual care and support.

This report was written during the testing phase of our new approach to regulating adult social care services. After this testing phase, inspection of consent to care and treatment, restraint, and practice under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) was moved from the key question 'Is the service safe?' to 'Is the service effective?'

The ratings for this location were awarded in October 2014. They can be directly compared with any other service we have rated since then, including in relation to consent, restraint, and the MCA under the 'Effective' section. Our written findings in relation to these topics, however, can be read in the 'Is the service safe' sections of this report.

Is the service safe?

Our findings

The provider had systems in place to make sure they were protected from abuse and avoidable harm. Ninety per cent of people who completed our questionnaire said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; 'I feel safe from abuse and harm when I'm supported by my carer.' Other people answered 'don't know' to this question.

People we met with their shared lives carers were very comfortable, relaxed and happy with their carers. One relative told us: "I am more than happy with the service we get. I know they are safe and well looked after."

The scheme's staff were employed by Dorset County Council. The staff supported shared lives carers who worked on a self-employed basis. All staff and shared lives carers completed training on safeguarding adults during their induction period and received refresher training in this area. All of them knew how to report any allegations or concerns. They were confident that any concerns would be fully investigated and action would be taken to make sure people using the scheme were protected. One shared lives carer told us: "They tell you all about what to do about things like abuse and give you information about it. I think the message is report it immediately."

There were regular reviews of people's placements conducted by the shared lives staff. People had opportunities to talk with the member of staff without the carer present which meant they had an opportunity to share any worries about their shared lives carer. One person told us: "I get time on my own with the staff. I could say whatever I wanted but I feel safe and comfortable with my carer." We saw evidence that when a person using the scheme raised concerns during their review immediate action was taken. This included ensuring the person was protected and alerting, and working with, other professionals to make sure a full investigation was carried out.

Staff who worked for the scheme and shared lives carers, who supported people as part of their family, had a good knowledge of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. They knew how to make sure people who lacked capacity had their legal rights protected. All staff and shared lives carers knew how to support people to make decisions and how to involve other professionals and personal representatives if a person lacked the capacity to make a decision. Care plans

showed that a person's capacity was considered in all aspects of their care. Where someone lacked the capacity to make a decision about treatment for a medical condition appropriate people had been involved and a decision had been made in the person's best interests.

Risk assessments were in place to make sure people were able to take part in activities and maintain their independence with minimum risk to themselves and others. Care records identified risks that were specific to the person and there were strategies in place to minimise risk. This ensured people received a consistent approach to risk to make sure they were kept safe and enabled to take part in activities in line with their interests or abilities. One person we met needed support to go out because they had limited road sense and would be at risk. We heard how this person was always supported by their shared lives carer when they went out which showed risk assessments were being followed.

Risks of abuse to people using the scheme were minimised because of the rigorous process in place for the approval of shared lives carers. One member of staff told us: "The process can take up to a year. People we work with are very vulnerable and we need to make sure they will be safe." One shared lives carer told us: "My approval took about six months. It was certainly thorough. The staff even met face to face with all my referees."

We looked at the application for one carer who had recently been approved. It covered all areas of the person's circumstances and motivation for joining the scheme. Each prospective shared lives carer underwent appropriate checks to make sure they were safe to work with vulnerable adults. References were obtained and all had to complete the County Council's induction programme before being put forward to a panel to be approved. This made sure shared lives carers were of good character and had the basic skills and knowledge to carry out their role.

There were enough staff to safely support the scheme. Shared lives carers said they were always able to contact a member of staff if they had any concerns or needed support. All shared lives carers had an allocated scheme worker. One shared lives carer told us: "My worker visits regularly and I know they are always at the end of the phone if I need them." Another said: "If your worker isn't

Is the service safe?

available for any reason you can always talk to one of the others or the manager. There's always someone available. Out of hours we have an emergency number we can call. You don't feel on your own."

Is the service effective?

Our findings

People received effective care and support to meet their needs because shared lives staff and carers had an excellent knowledge of people's needs and wishes.

People spoke very positively about the service. We received positive comments in person and in questionnaires about the standard of care provided by the scheme. Comments included: "It has done them so much good I just can't think of a better outcome," "I am now able to be more independent and am planning to move to my own flat" and "I have more confidence, I have been taken to shows, parties and day trips."

The shared lives scheme was run by competent and knowledgeable professionals. All staff at the scheme were qualified social workers who were registered with the appropriate professional body which ensured they remained competent to practice. Staff told us there were excellent opportunities for on-going training to make sure their skills and knowledge were kept up to date. One shared lives carer wrote on their questionnaire: "The scheme has developed in both size and quality. In my opinion this has been achieved by the recruitment of high calibre staff who have an excellent understanding of both the scheme and the diversity of the service, service users and carers."

Originally the scheme only supported people who had a learning disability but has expanded to include other people over the age of 18 including people with dementia. One member of staff had a lead role on the initiative to provide support to people with dementia and had received specific training in this area. This specific training had also been provided to shared lives carers to enable them to provide effective support to people.

People were supported by staff and shared lives carers who had received up to date training to make sure they could effectively meet people's needs. There was an annual plan to make sure staff and carers received opportunities for learning and were kept up to date with any changes in good practice or legislation. The provider held two large training events for carers each year. These were a chance for shared lives carers to get together for support and learning. Additional training was provided on an individual basis. Shared lives carers all said they were very satisfied with the training provided by the scheme and felt they had

the skills and knowledge to effectively support the people they cared for. The provider monitored attendance at training events and records confirmed that staff and shared lives carers were receiving regular training in a variety of subjects. We saw the agenda for recent events and noted that training included; nutrition and dementia, reporting and record keeping, the Mental Capacity Act and data protection.

The scheme was able to support a number of people with very complex needs within a family situation because shared lives carers had access to support and guidance to meet people's complex mental and physical health needs. For example one carer had been matched with a person who had mental health needs and the scheme had provided training in this. Another shared lives carer told us they had received training in dealing with a specific health need which was relevant to the person they supported. This ensured that shared lives carers and staff had the skills and knowledge to effectively care for people using the scheme.

People were supported by carers who shared their interests to make sure their needs were met. For example, by carrying out an effective matching process. One relative said: "The carer chosen is just a perfect match. The moment we all met we just knew it was going to work. We wanted someone young and lively in a placement that had children. That's exactly what we got. Brilliant." A person using the service told us about how they had been matched to someone who shared their interests. They said: "I like horticulture and motor racing and so do they."

People were supported to receive effective care and treatment to meet their individual health care needs. Care plans showed that all people using the scheme were registered with a GP and they saw other professionals such as opticians, specialist nurses, and chiropodists as required. One person we met said their carer had supported them to attend an optician's appointment. We also heard from one person who had been admitted to hospital following an accident and had been supported by their shared lives carer throughout their admission. This demonstrated a strong commitment to making sure people received effective care and support from healthcare services.

People received effective care and support to meet their nutritional needs. All care plans outlined people's nutritional needs and the support they required with eating

Is the service effective?

and drinking. People told us that everyone at their shared lives placement ate together as a family which made it a sociable occasion. Some people said they helped with shopping and cooking which enabled them to make choices about their meals.

People's nutritional needs were effectively met because the shared lives carers had a good understanding of people's individual needs. For example, one care plan described how the person had been seen by a speech and language

therapist who had recommended a soft diet. The shared lives carer told us how they supported the person to receive an adequate diet. This person continued to eat out in cafes and restaurants with the family because they took a small blender which enabled them to discreetly make sure the food was at the right consistency. This showed that the person received effective care and support to meet their dietary needs without compromising on trips out.

Is the service caring?

Our findings

People who used the scheme were supported by shared lives carers and workers who were kind and caring. People were supported as part of a family unit and were involved in all family occasions and events. One person told us “I feel very at home with my carer.” A relative said “It’s just like having a whole new extended family. We couldn’t be happier with how it has all worked out.” One person wrote on their questionnaire: “I have become a part of their family whilst keeping my independence!”

People were able to tell us about activities and holidays they had taken part in and about social occasions they had attended. The people we met with their carers appeared very comfortable and relaxed with each other. Shared lives carers spoke with people in a respectful and caring manner.

Ninety per cent of people who completed our questionnaires said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statements ‘I am happy with the care and support I get from my carer’ and ‘My carer is caring and kind.’

Staff who worked for the scheme had a good knowledge of the needs of the people who used the service. One relative said “They spent time really getting to know them so that they could find the right place.” Shared lives carers we spoke with had an excellent knowledge of the people they cared for including their likes and interests. The information carers told us about people matched the care records held about the individual.

People had opportunities to meet with prospective carers and spend time in the shared lives environment before making a decision to use the service. This enabled people to build a relationship with the shared lives carer and be involved in all decisions about their care. Shared lives carers said that although they were very confident in the matching process the ultimate decision about whether a person used the placement was the persons. We were told that people’s decisions were always respected by the

scheme workers. One relative told us “They talk things through with me but my relative is always involved in all decisions.” Another relative said “I have been really impressed by how hard everyone has tried to make sure they are consulted about everything.”

We spoke with one shared lives carer who had recently been approved. They told us about how introductions were being made for a prospective placement. The shared lives carer had been able to meet with the person and their family. The person had visited the placement with the support of their family and further visits were planned. The shared lives carer said: “It’s all about building a relationship that everyone is comfortable with. It’s a big step for people to come into your home. There’s no pressure and everything has to be at the person’s pace.”

People were involved in writing and reviewing their care plans to make sure they were reflective of their wishes and lifestyle preferences. We looked at six care plans all gave evidence that the person using the service, or their representative, had been involved in the creation and review of the care plan. People were able to set goals for things that were important to them. People’s daily and weekly routines were recorded to make sure care and support was provided in line with people’s wishes. One person said “I get a say about everything.”

People’s privacy was respected and they were encouraged to maintain independent living skills. One person said: “I have my own room. It’s mine.” Another person told us: “They help me to cook and learn new things.” One person wrote on their questionnaire: “They have given me the confidence to move forward and feel positive about possibly living independently.”

Part of the application and approval process for people wanting to become a shared lives carer explored the potential carers understanding of respect, privacy and dignity. This ensured that carers recruited to the scheme were aware of these issues and were able to support people in a way that promoted their privacy and dignity.

Is the service responsive?

Our findings

People received care and support that was personalised and responsive to their needs. Everyone we asked about the scheme told us it provided a service that was personalised to each individual. Comments included: “The scheme treats everyone as an individual and with the respect they deserve” and “It is all personalised to them. There is a mutual respect and they have a lot of fun as well.”

People and their representatives were involved in all aspects of the assessment process to make sure they were matched to shared lives carers who were able to respond to their needs and preferences. One relative told us: “You just couldn’t get a more personal service. They do everything they possibly can to find the right placement.”

Staff told us how the matching process took account of the physical environment of the shared lives placement as well as a person’s needs and wishes. One shared lives carer told us: “Where we live is quite remote so it wouldn’t suit everyone even if they shared our interests and we felt we could meet their needs. The staff are aware of all those things and it’s all part of the match.”

The scheme worked creatively to meet people’s needs. One relative told us: “We are matched to two placements which means we have greater flexibility about respite and day care.” They also told us that the scheme responded positively to any changes in need and made adjustments to the care provided in accordance with the changes.

The scheme ensured people received appropriate care to meet their changing needs. A shared lives carer told us how one person they supported had become physically frail and required a higher level of physical care than they were able to provide. The shared lives carer told us how well the scheme had responded to the changes in need and in arranging alternative care for the person.

The scheme worked well with other professionals to make sure people’s needs were met. One health and social care professional wrote on their questionnaire: “On each occasion I have used the service the shared lives carer has been excellent and very mindful of the service user’s needs and views. On one occasion emergency respite was

arranged the same day and the placement was very successful.” Another wrote: “I was communicated with through the whole process and kept involved throughout. Excellent service”

People had care plans that were reflective of their individual needs and preferences. Care plans were up dated to reflect any changes in a person’s abilities. This ensured that people received care and support to meet their changing needs. For example when someone required a change in diet their specialist requirements were fully recorded and they received the appropriate care to meet their needs. Health and social care professionals who completed questionnaires all answered they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘The scheme makes sure it’s carers know about the needs, choices and preferences of the people they work with.

The scheme helped people to maintain contact with family and friends. People told us their family were always made welcome at their shared lives home and they were invited to social occasions with their ‘extended family.’ One relative told us: “The scheme is about the whole family not just the service user. I feel more involved now than ever and I feel very supported by everyone at the scheme.” One person wrote on their questionnaire: “It’s good to go out to the pub with my carer and feel part of a social group.”

People were able to maintain links with personal and professional contacts outside the placement. Most people who used the service attended day services and work placements. People were also supported to take part in a variety of activities. One person who used the service said they had recently been on holiday with friends from another shared lives placement. One person wrote on their questionnaire; “I love my shared lives carer. We have fun or go out shopping or meeting friends.”

People told us they knew how to make a complaint and said they would feel listened to if they raised any concerns. All shared lives carers who completed a questionnaire said they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘Shared lives workers are accessible, approachable and deal effectively with any concerns I raise.’ Records of complaints received by the scheme showed that all complaints or concerns were responded to. We also saw that once complaints had been investigated the team held discussions to see what lessons could be learned from the investigation to improve the service offered. The shared lives policy on quality assurance set out ways, such as

Is the service responsive?

regular meetings with shared lives carers and people who used the scheme, that the scheme would listen to feedback and make changes and improvements in line with feedback.

Is the service well-led?

Our findings

The scheme was well led by a registered manager who was committed to providing a high quality service which was personalised to the people who used it.

The registered manager had been in post for approximately three years. In this time positive changes had been made to the scheme and were continuing to be made. One shared lives carer told us: “The manager has brought the scheme into the 21st century and has done so by involving people all the way.” Another said: “There have been huge changes. The manager is open and approachable. I think we all feel more regulated and scrutinised now which has made it a much safer and more professional scheme.”

The registered manager and all staff members engaged in the inspection process in a very positive way. They were able to share their views about the service and the registered manager made time for staff to speak with us without them being present. The discussion with staff demonstrated that the commitment to providing a very personalised service to people, and making continual improvements to the scheme, was one that was shared by the whole team.

The team had promoted the scheme by meeting with professionals and taking part in publicity events. The registered manager informed us they had spent time talking with local health and social care professionals to make sure they knew how the scheme worked. We saw photos of the team when they took part in a publicity event at the town hall to raise awareness to local people. We heard that a further event was planned for shared lives week in October and a website was being developed. The team told us that it is hoped that these initiatives will raise the profile of the scheme and the benefits it is able to offer to people who need support.

Recently some members of the team had worked with people using the service and shared lives carers to develop a new care plan format. One shared lives carer told us: “I have been invited to take part in the design of the new care plan documents. Its good they are involving us and people using the service and hopefully we will come out with something that works for everyone.” We saw examples of the work carried out so far which showed us that the new care plan will be more user friendly with pictures to make it accessible to people of all abilities.

People, staff and shared lives carers felt the scheme was very inclusive and consulted people on all aspects on the service. As well as formal meetings and training events for staff and shared lives carers there were regular social events. One relative told us: “The socials are brilliant, we are all invited and they really make an effort to make sure everyone can be included. That’s family, friends and anyone else who is important to the service user.” We saw that at the end of each year the registered manager produced an annual report which set out the feedback from all interested parties and responded publically to comments made. It also gave information about complaints made and action which had been taken to address shortfalls identified.

The scheme had been involved in a national pilot to extend the work of the scheme to include providing support to people with dementia and any adults over the age of 18. After a successful pilot the scheme extended their provision. We spoke with one relative of a person with dementia. They told us: “Since we discovered the scheme we haven’t looked back. Everything is really geared around their needs and the carers are flexible and caring.”

All shared lives carers received regular reviews which gave them an opportunity to share their views and opinions. It also enabled the scheme staff to address any issues or training needs for the shared lives carers. Staff received regular supervision and appraisals where their performance was monitored and plans for future development were set out.

Staff told us that in addition to formal supervision they were able to discuss issues and raise concerns with the registered manager at any time. Due to the nature of the area covered by the scheme staff were based throughout the county. Staff said there continued to be good communication between all areas and they used electronic communication in addition to face to face meetings.

At the time of the inspection staff were piloting a flexible working policy to make them more easily accessible to people who used the scheme and shared lives carers. One member of staff said: “We have to be good at keeping our calendars up to date so everyone knows where we are and when we are available.” Shared lives carers and relatives told us they thought communication was excellent and they were always able to contact a member of the team.

Is the service well-led?

One shared lives carer told us: “They are always available. Since they have employed an administrator it’s even better. They are really on the ball and always know where everyone is and get them to contact you.”

Anyone wishing to become a shared lives carer went through a thorough application process before having their application presented to a panel. The panel was made up of a chair from the County Council, a deputy chair and independent members. This ensured the process was open

and transparent. We spoke with two independent members of the panel. They both felt the scheme and panel was efficiently run and described the shared lives team as ‘very well respected.’ Panel members told us that because of the hard work of the staff in preparing applications and applicants for panel they seldom refused anyone. One member told us: “By the time applications get to us everything is ready. All the paper work is in order and the applicants are aware of exactly what the job entails.”