

## The Link Nursing & Care Agency Ltd

# Link Support

### Inspection report

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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?

Outstanding 

Is the service responsive?

Outstanding 

Is the service well-led?

Good 

# Summary of findings

## Overall summary

Link Support is a domiciliary care service providing personal care to people living in their own homes. The service provides personal care to people with a range of needs including people with a learning disability and/or who are on the autistic spectrum, people with mental health needs and people living with a sensory and/or physical disability.

Not everyone who uses the service receives personal care. CQC only inspects where people receive personal care. This is help with tasks related to personal hygiene and eating. At the time of this inspection the service was supporting 21 people. Eighteen people lived in 10 supported living houses, one person lived in their own flat in sheltered accommodation and two people lived with family members.

Where applicable, the service has been developed and designed in line with the principles and values that underpin Registering the Right Support and other best practice guidance. This ensures that people who use the service can live as full a life as possible and achieve the best possible outcomes. The principles reflect the need for people with learning disabilities and/or autism to live meaningful lives that include control, choice, and independence.

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

People were treated with great care and kindness. Staff demonstrated a strong empathy for people supported by the service and were skilled in supporting people to identify and work towards life goals. Staff used innovative ways to help people manage and reduce their anxieties, leading to people gaining in confidence and being able to enjoy their lives more. People were treated with utmost respect and staff worked tirelessly to ensure their dignity was upheld. This was confirmed by people we spoke with and relatives who provided feedback. One relative commented, "They are just brilliant. They would do absolutely anything for [family member's name]."

People received truly person-centred support which promoted excellent outcomes for them and included supporting their independence and control over their lives. People received care and support that was personalised to meet their individual needs. Staff worked extremely well together for the benefit of people and the ethos of the service focused on the needs of the people and their wellbeing. One community professional commented, "I have worked with Link Support for many years and have always found them to be very professional and conscientious in their approach, while maintaining the individual at the heart of the service they give."

People were able to enjoy a number of activities, based on their likes and preferences. Staff continually looked for ways to improve and enhance people's lives by exploring new activities and employment they could participate in. The service was particularly successful in helping people re-build and maintain relationships with family members and others important to them.

The outcomes for people using the service who had a learning disability and/or autism reflected the

principles and values of Registering the Right Support. The service and staff strongly promoted choice and control, independence and inclusion. People's support focused on them having as many opportunities as possible for them to gain new skills and become more independent. The whole ethos and values of the service were designed, and were successful, in making sure people were supported to live a full and meaningful life.

People were protected from the risks of abuse and said they felt safe with the staff providing their support and care. Risks to people's personal safety had been assessed and plans were in place to minimise those risks. Staff recruitment and staffing levels supported people to stay safe while working towards their goals and going about their lives.

People received effective care and support from staff who knew them well and were well trained. People received effective health care and support. Medicines were handled correctly and safely. People's rights to make their own decisions were protected. They were supported to have maximum choice and control of their lives and staff supported them in the least restrictive way possible; the policies and systems in the service supported this practice.

People benefitted from staff who were happy in their work and felt well managed and supported. People benefitted from a service which had an open and inclusive culture and encouraged suggestions and ideas for improvement from people who use the service, their relatives and staff. The quality assurance systems were successful in ensuring the high quality of the service was maintained.

For more details, please see the full report which is on the CQC website at [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

#### Rating at last inspection

The last rating for this service was good (published 20 June 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?

Good ●

The service was safe.

Details are in our safe findings below.

### Is the service effective?

Good ●

The service was effective.

Details are in our effective findings below.

### Is the service caring?

Outstanding ☆

The service was exceptionally caring.

Details are in our caring findings below.

### Is the service responsive?

Outstanding ☆

The service was exceptionally responsive.

Details are in our responsive findings below.

### Is the service well-led?

Good ●

The service was well-led.

Details are in our well-led findings below.

# Link Support

## 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

This inspection was carried out by one inspector.

#### 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 provides care and support to people living in 10 '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. This means that they and the provider 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 it is a small service and we needed to be sure that the provider or registered manager would be in the office to support the inspection.

Inspection activity started on 7 January 2020 and ended on 10 January 2020. We visited the office location on 7 and 8 January 2020.

#### What we did before inspection

We reviewed information we had received about the service since the last inspection. We sought feedback from the local authority and professionals who work with the service. 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 of this information to plan our inspection.

#### During the inspection

We spoke with four people who use the service about their experience of the care provided. We spoke with nine members of staff including the registered manager, the operations manager, two service managers, the training and development officer, the administrator and three support workers.

We reviewed a range of records. These included four people's care plans and associated daily and medical records. We looked at two staff files in relation to recruitment and staff training, supervision and appraisal logs. A variety of records relating to the management of the service, including policies and procedures were also reviewed.

#### After the inspection

We continued to seek clarification from the provider to validate evidence found. We looked at training data and quality assurance records. We received feedback from six relatives, five health and social care professionals and 10 members of staff.

# 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.

### Assessing risk, safety monitoring and management

- People were protected from risks associated with their health and care provision and staff showed initiative when looking for ways to reduce risks to individuals.
- Staff assessed risks to each person, such as moving and handling, and care plans incorporated measures to reduce or prevent potential risks to individuals.
- Professionals thought the service and risks to individuals were managed so that people were protected. One professional told us, "[There is] a good balance of minimising risk and pursuing good quality of life goals. They have supported a number of individuals with challenging needs and I have always found they have approached this positively and safely."
- Risk assessments of people's homes were carried out and staff were aware of the lone working policy in place to keep them safe in their work.
- Emergency plans were in place, such as plans for extreme weather conditions.

### Systems and processes to safeguard people from the risk of abuse

- Staff knew how to recognise and protect people from the risk of abuse and had received training in safeguarding adults.
- Staff knew what actions to take if they felt people were at risk of harm. One member of staff added, "I am also allowed to attend other training that may improve support techniques..."
- People said they felt safe in their homes. Relatives said they felt their family members were safe with the staff. One relative added, "I have always felt I can trust Link staff."

### Staffing and recruitment

- Staff were provided in line with the hours identified in people's individual care packages.
- Professionals thought the service made sure that there were sufficient numbers of suitable staff to keep people safe and meet their needs. One professional commented, "Link Support will advocate for more support hours where they feel it is necessary to ensure individuals are safe..."
- People said staff had enough time to support them. Staff said they had enough time to provide the care people needed within the time allocated to them.
- Systems in place for call logging and tracking were successful in preventing missed calls.
- People were protected by the recruitment processes in place and followed when employing staff. These made sure, as far as possible, that people were protected from staff being employed who were not suitable.

### Using medicines safely; Preventing and controlling infection; Learning lessons when things go wrong

- People's medicines were handled safely. The training records confirmed staff had received training in

handling medicines.

- Only staff trained and assessed as competent were allowed to administer medicines.
- Medicines administration record sheets were up to date and had been completed correctly by the staff administering the medicines.
- Staff received training in the control of infection and were provided with personal protective equipment, so they could carry out their work safely. There had been no incidents or concerns raised related to the control of infection since our last inspection.
- Accidents and incidents were recorded, together with details of actions taken and the outcome of any investigation. Appropriate action was taken promptly to deal with any incidents and steps taken to ensure lessons were learnt when things went wrong.



# 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.

Supporting people to live healthier lives, access healthcare services and support

- People received effective health care support from their GP and for other professional services, such as occupational therapists.
- Staff were quick to identify when people needed healthcare support and sought assistance promptly and appropriately. We saw a thank you letter from a relative to the staff and management of the service regarding actions taken at the time of a medical emergency for their family member. Staff had identified that the person was at risk of developing sepsis and had called the emergency services. The person was admitted to hospital, where they stayed for four days. The relative wrote, "I would like to congratulate you and the team for the magnificent way in which you responded to [name's] medical emergency... The team were superb. Nothing was left to chance and their response was always immediate and correct." They went on to describe how Link Support had even provided overnight cover at the hospital. This was so their family member would have familiar staff with him to reassure him in a potentially frightening situation.
- Community professionals thought the service supported people to maintain good health, have access to healthcare services and receive ongoing healthcare support. One professional stated, "Link provides this [healthcare] support, working well with the community health team and local health services."
- People received effective care and support from staff who knew how they liked things done. Each care plan was based on a full assessment, included individual preferences and choices, and demonstrated the person had been involved in drawing up their plan.
- The care plans were kept under review and amended when changes occurred or if new information came to light.

Supporting people to eat and drink enough to maintain a balanced diet; Staff working with other agencies to provide consistent, effective, timely care

- People were able to choose their meals, which they planned with staff support if needed. Where there was concern that someone was losing weight, staff made referrals to dietitians and speech and language therapists via their GP.
- The care plans incorporated advice and recommendations in relation to specialist diets and safe swallowing when received.
- Staff worked well with other agencies to understand and meet people's individual and changing needs. Community professionals felt the service worked well in partnership with other agencies. One professional commented, "Link Support are always willing to engage with other services as required to ensure outcomes are met for individuals."

Staff support: induction, training, skills and experience

- People received care from staff that had the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to perform their roles. People and relatives thought staff had the training and skills they needed when supporting them. Community professionals felt the service provided effective care and that staff had the knowledge and skills they needed to carry out their roles and responsibilities.
- Staff felt they received the training they needed to enable them to meet people's needs, choices and preferences. The service provided training in topics they considered mandatory, such as moving and handling, first aid and fire safety. All training the provider considered to be mandatory was up to date.
- Staff received additional training in specialist areas relevant to the needs of individual people, such as training in caring for people with epilepsy, diabetes and providing positive behaviour support.
- Staff received formal supervision at least twice a year to discuss their work and how they felt about it. Staff told us they felt this enhanced their skills. Managers also carried out unannounced spot checks and monitoring visits to observe staff as they worked. Staff told us managers worked alongside them on shift on frequent occasions so they were up to date on the care people received and the way the staff worked.
- Once a year staff had a formal appraisal of their performance over the previous 12 months.

#### Ensuring consent to care and treatment in line with law and guidance

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) provides a legal framework for making particular decisions on behalf of people who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves. The Act requires that, as far as possible, people make their own decisions and are helped to do so when needed. When they lack mental capacity to take particular decisions, any made on their behalf must be in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible. People can only be deprived of their liberty to receive care and treatment when this is in their best interests and legally authorised under the MCA. When people receive care and treatment in their own homes an application must be made to the Court of Protection for them to authorise people to be deprived of their liberty.

- We checked whether the service was working within the principles of the MCA and found that they were. We also found any conditions on authorisations to deprive a person of their liberty had the appropriate legal authority and were being met.
- Staff received training in the MCA and were clear on how it should be reflected in their day to day work.
- Care plans showed that people were involved in decision making and consent and that, where appropriate, decisions were made in their best interests.

# 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 outstanding. At this inspection this key question has remained the same. This meant people were truly respected and valued as individuals; and empowered as partners in their care in an exceptional service.

Ensuring people are well treated and supported

- People benefitted greatly by the service's focus on building strong relationships between staff and the people they support, as well as their families. The staff had done some exceptional work in supporting people to help them improve, develop and maintain relationships with those important to them. This in turn had led to a marked and ongoing improvement in people's wellbeing and feelings of self-worth.
- The registered manager told us of the work done with one family. Staff had identified that one person, when visiting their parents, would sometimes get agitated, making it difficult for the visit to continue. The registered manager explained, "This was having a detrimental impact on both him and his parents and was affecting his ability to pay family visits. Link Support's instructors in [nationally recognised positive behaviour support training], arranged a person-specific refresher course for the staff team and invited both parents to attend. This course was highly constructive for all, especially the parents, as it helped them further understand antecedents, setting events and triggers to his behaviours and develop positive behavioural strategies they could use when supporting him at their home. This has been seen to be highly effective and it has facilitated continuity in the way he is being supported. This has resulted in a reduced number of incidents, increased his opportunities to go home, improved his quality of life and their family relationship as a whole."
- In another example the registered manager told us of a person who had very little contact with any family member for over twenty years. Staff tried and eventually found a family member who informed them of an upcoming family event. The staff member discussed this with the person and asked if she wanted to attend the event. The registered manager explained, "She clearly indicated that she wanted to attend this, which was subsequently arranged by the staff. The staff accompanying the person stated that on arrival her interaction with her family was remarkable and heart-warming. They all shared stories with her of the past and her reaction was one of true affection. Following this, she has been supported to maintain contact with some of the family members for birthdays, summer barbecues and drop-by visits. Ever since, ...when her family members visit, she sits with them, holds their hand, strokes their cheeks, offers them food with lots of smiles and appears really happy."
- One person that Link Support had supported for many years was coming up to her thirtieth wedding anniversary. The registered manager explained, "The person told a member of staff that she wished she could have her marriage 'accepted and celebrated'... A staff member wanted to do something special for the person and her husband as they had no contact with any family members. The member of staff worked with the person's husband to obtain a number of photographs which documented their life together and made up a story picture book. She then arranged a party ... and invited their friends. Another person we support provided the disco. Link Support provided the venue, food and transport for all involved. The person and her

husband said they had never felt so happy. This person is proud of her story book and album and will show this to any visitor to her house and talks about the party." We saw a letter sent by the couple after their party saying, "Thank you to everyone at Link for everything you do for us, our lovely anniversary party and for our lovely anniversary card and gifts."

- The registered manager told us of another occasion when someone they support approached a staff member and said that it was his father's birthday soon. The registered manager told us, "...this person enjoys cooking for himself and his housemates. He was extremely excited by the suggestion of inviting his father and his friend to come to dinner for the occasion. With some help and suggestions, the person made an invitation and sent this to his father, with options for the menu. His father responded, and the person went shopping with a member of staff to get the ingredients. On the day, the person cooked a starter of prawn cocktail, chicken curry and chocolate cake. The person said he wanted to serve his father the meal and would like to look smart for him. The staff members sourced appropriate clothing, so the person looked like a very smart waiter. Posing proudly for a family photo, the person looked really proud and pleased that he could do that for his father. His father said he had never had such a good birthday and told the person he was very proud of him. This positive experience has since paved the way and given the person the confidence to want to invite his friends and relatives [to his home] where he can show off his talent."
- Relatives were very complimentary about the care their family members received. We saw an email from a relative to the service saying, "Seeing [Name] yesterday he was so calm and content. What would I do without you all?" In feedback to us as part of this inspection one relative said, "All I know is how happy my son is." Another relative wrote to the service saying, "A huge thank you to you all for the barbeque last Sunday and for the last eight years when you have all looked after [Name] so brilliantly well!"

#### Respecting and promoting people's privacy, dignity and independence

- Staff were exceptionally skilled and pro-active in identifying and working in innovative ways to help and support people maintain their privacy and dignity and increase their independence. We saw examples of the successful work staff had carried out resulting in marked improvements to people's lives and wellbeing.
- Staff noted that one person, with reduced visibility, was requiring regular support with his toileting needs, including the need for frequent and related personal care. The staff team observed that he was unable to move safely around his room and could not identify the door into his bathroom. Staff contacted an occupational therapist for advice, which staff then followed. The doorframe to the toilet door was painted a contrasting colour to the surroundings and the toilet seat was changed to an orange one. This enabled the person to identify and use the toilet without staff assistance. The registered manager explained this has led to the person being continent during the day, greatly improving his independence, dignity, safety, and wellbeing.
- Another example of innovative thinking that led to greatly improved privacy and dignity for one person related to a person living in a supported living house. The registered manager explained, "Night staff reported that one person, who was non-verbal, was having disturbed nights, as he was agitated after he had been to the toilet. Staff suggested that a call bell could be positioned in his bathroom, which he could activate if he required support. This was agreed, installed and linked to the pager. Staff worked with him during the day to [learn how to] use this and helped him understand and become confident with the new system. He is now able to seek assistance quickly and it has alleviated his anxieties. Staff have noticed that this has resulted in much improved sleep patterns and a positive impact on his physical well-being."
- People and their relatives said staff treated them with respect and helped them maintain their dignity. Professionals said the service promoted and respected people's privacy and dignity with one professional adding, "Very much so, and [they] endeavour to do this at all opportunities."

Supporting people to express their views and be involved in making decisions about their care; Respecting equality and diversity

- The service and staff put great store in involving people in the running of their lives, helping them to express their wishes and be in control of their care and support.
- People were able to express their view in regular contacts with the service managers and registered manager. These contacts included people visiting the office for work or activities, senior staff working on shift, spot check visits of staff, reviews of their care plans and in annual surveys carried out by the provider. People and their relatives said they would feel comfortable to contact the office if they wanted to.
- The care plans were drawn up with people, using input from their relatives, health and social care professionals and from the staff teams' knowledge from working with them in their homes. People told us they were involved in making decisions about their care and support. This was supported by information seen in the care plans.
- People's equality and diversity needs were identified and set out in their care plans. Staff provided support to meet the diverse needs of people using the service including those related to disability, gender, ethnicity and faith. Staff were respectful of people's cultural and spiritual needs and knew the needs of each person well.

## 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 now 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

- The service showed an exceptionally strong person-centred, thoughtful, caring and responsive ethos in the way they worked with people who use their service. They often thought 'outside the box' when looking for solutions to challenges some people faced. The service and staff were highly skilled and totally committed to placing people at the heart of all they did. By focusing on providing excellent person-centred care and support, staff were able to achieve positive results for people and prevent further negative impact on their health and wellbeing.
- For example, the registered manager told us of one person who was not always aware of risks related to fire. Although measures were in place to mitigate the risk, staff felt involving the person more in their own safety was vital. With this goal in mind the registered manager explained, "Staff arranged for the Fire Safety Officer from the local fire station to attend the home and help the person understand how to keep his home safe. After this, the staff team involved the person in monitoring the safety of the home. He now audits the house with a staff member and helps do the fire check list, alarm test and evacuation practices. We sourced fire awareness training and he obtained a fire awareness certificate, which he shows to his relatives and friends and is very proud of. The person is now the assistant health and safety manager and has an ID badge which he wears when he is performing this role. He is proud of this job and will tell people what he does to keep the house safe. This has had a major impact on keeping the person, and others who live with him, safe. There have been no further recurrences of incidents [that caused the initial concerns]."
- In another example, the service had provided support to one person for many years. At our last inspection this person had spoken to us saying how happy they were with their life. In 2019 the person's support agency was transferred to another company by the local authority's commissioners. Unfortunately, the new arrangement did not work out for the person. The commissioners asked Link Support if they could take the package back, which they agreed to do. The relative told us, "I can't fault Link Support, they have been magnificent. They arranged everything. Without them I don't know what we would have done." The relative went on to say, "They are just brilliant, they would do absolutely anything for [Name]. They stepped in and saved the day, they get top marks." During the inspection we spoke with the person, who said he was very happy with how things were now. He was visiting the office for an activity and obviously felt very comfortable and at home with the staff and other people taking part in the activity that he had known previously.
- Staff were always eager to look for and use technology where it would help and improve the quality of someone's life. The registered manager described one such occasion, "A person we support was unable to use a normal toilet independently due to his physical disability. This impacted on his self-esteem and [he was] embarrassed in having to ask staff to support him. It manifested in him taking numerous showers and

having frequent changes of clothes throughout the day in order to feel clean. The staff team discussed this with an occupational therapist, and after the referral, sourced funding for a 'wash and dry' automated toilet. This has had a dramatic impact on this person's self-esteem, independence and confidence. He no longer needs to ask staff for support and doesn't need to shower or change his clothes [frequently] during the day."

- Professionals said the service provided personalised care that was responsive to people's needs. One professional told us, "Managers will often provide support if needed. They know individuals well, so support is consistent... They will always try their best to provide extra support at short notice if required." Another professional commented, "[They have] always been adaptable and prepared to make changes to suit the client's needs."

- People's care plans were based on a full assessment, with information gathered from the person and others who knew them well. The assessments and care plans captured details of people's abilities and wishes regarding their personal care. The daily notes demonstrated staff provided personal care based on the way individuals liked things done.

- People's needs and care plans were regularly assessed for any changes. People's changing needs were monitored, and the package of care adjusted to meet those needs if necessary. People told us they were happy with the care and support they received from the service. One person told us their home was, "Calm and relaxing, really wonderful and safe. [I am] very happy."

Support to follow interests and to take part in activities that are socially and culturally relevant to them;  
Supporting people to develop and maintain relationships to avoid social isolation

- The registered manager and staff showed an excellent understanding of people's individual need to take part in social activities that were of value to them. The registered manager and staff were passionate about helping people to lead more meaningful lives and often went above and beyond to support people to have an interesting and enriching life.

- For example, one person was a volunteer for the Dog Walking Trust. The registered manager told us, "This is something he asked to do and appears to greatly enjoy. He mentioned to one of the [other] volunteers after a session, during the winter, that he was worried that the dogs were cold. They stated that finding spare blankets for the dogs was very difficult. The person asked Link Support staff if he could find blankets for the dogs, so they could 'keep them warm and happy'. The staff team worked with the person to design a poster and they asked local charity shops if they could help collect some blankets. Over a short period of time, he has gathered many blankets which he regularly takes to the kennels. This has given him a great feeling of achievement and has alleviated his genuine anxieties that the dogs were cold. He says he is 'happy that the dogs can be warm and safe now'. The blankets are used by the kennels, he continues to walk the dogs and talks about the blankets which he provides for them."

- The registered manager told us about one person who had lived for many years in shared accommodation. Soon after Link Support was commissioned to provide the service, staff expressed their concerns about the level of restrictions imposed on this person due to the nature of her accommodation. Link Support management and the person's relatives began the process of facilitating a move to more suitable accommodation where she could enjoy a life without unnecessary restrictions. After a few years of overcoming obstacles and difficulties, this became possible and the person eventually moved into her own bungalow, close to her family home and free from unnecessary restrictions. In her previous accommodation, this person had very little contact with her twin sister, due to the distance of and dynamics of her home at the time. The registered manager explained, "A short while after she moved to her new home, her sister became more involved in the person's life. Her sister now visits every week. They have dinner and watch films together. They also go out together, with support from a member of staff. Her parents and extended family also visit this person more often. This has brought something special back into both twins' lives and that of their family."

- Link Support were given the contract to provide support to some people in supported living



accommodation, taking over from another provider. One member of staff explained, "The takeover of Link Support has made a big difference... For example, the people we support used to miss going to Wednesday Challenges Club but since Link took over, they have never missed going there. They really like it so much and actively participate in singing, dancing and DJing. They go cycling which never used to be the case before, trampolining, walks in the forests and parks and playing football in the open field and at leisure centres. Some of the people we support even arrange and meet up with their friends in Reading, one is planning to meet his long-term friends he had met about 8 years ago in Bournemouth and we are ready to support him. The example are many but those are just a few."

- Care plans showed people lived busy and active lives with activities planned and arranged based on their preferences, likes and dislikes. A number of people had part time employment at the service's office and others volunteered in the local area. People told us they were busy and enjoyed trying new activities.
- Link Support runs an all-expenses paid summer BBQ and Winter party for all people who use the service. They told us, "We invite and welcome relatives and provide free transport for people. The disco is run by one of the people we support who gets really excited during the build up to the party, arranging his play lists. The themes of the parties, food and activities are discussed during a bi-annual service user forum. These events have proved to be a great success, allowing for shared interaction for all involved in Link Support's services with games, singing and dancing. All involved have said how much they enjoy these events and want them to continue."

#### 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.

- People's communication needs were identified and recorded in their care plans. These needs were shared appropriately with others. We saw evidence that the identified information and communication needs were met for individuals. The registered manager was aware of the requirements of the AIS and was working on documenting people's communication needs in their care plans in a way that met the standard.

#### Improving care quality in response to complaints or concerns

- People and their relatives knew how to raise a complaint and were confident the service would take appropriate action. Staff were aware of the procedure to follow should anyone raise a concern with them. There had been no formal complaints to the service since our last inspection.
- Relatives told us staff responded well to any concerns they or their family member raised. One relative commented, "The Link management always react quickly in a positive way. They hold up their hands if they have got it wrong and sort it out quickly! [They are] very quick to put new protocols in place, or address issues, and involve staff who need to know."



# 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 good. At this inspection this key question has remained the same. This meant the service was consistently managed and well-led. Leaders and the culture they created promoted high-quality, person-centred care.

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

- Staff were very happy working for the service. They felt they were provided with training that helped them provide care and support to a high standard. One member of staff told us, "[The registered manager] is top quality and very professional when it comes to training and caring for her staff and service users. Link have been great to work for and I look forward to continuing with them until I retire."
- Staff said the managers asked what they thought about the service and took their views into account. All staff said they would recommend the service to a member of their own family. One member of staff said, "This is a small friendly company offering very high-quality support. I hope it stays as it is, and the dynamic is not lost - the high standards of support are the reason I work here."
- People received a service from staff who worked in an open and friendly culture. A member of staff commented, "I have worked for Link Support since 2012. Of all the care organisations I have worked for, I have to say Link Support not only offer excellent care to our service users, but they really do also care about the staff. They [management] make me feel that I am part of a great team. The people we support are very happy and they feel very much part of the Link 'family'. At each appraisal I have, I say that I look forward to continuing to work at Link Support, to give my service users the best support and care and to continue to be so happy with all aspects of my job."

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

- The registered manager and staff were clear about their roles. All the registration requirements were met, and the registered manager ensured that notifications were sent to us when required. Notifications are events that the registered person is required by law to inform us of.
- Records were up to date, fully completed and kept confidential where required.
- There was an effective audit system in place that included audits of different aspects of the running of the service such as care plans, medicines, staff training, staff supervision and other documentation. Where issues were identified, actions had been carried out to ensure everything met the required standard.

Engaging and involving people using the service, the public and staff, fully considering their equality characteristics

- There were a number of different ways that the views of people, staff and professionals were sought and used in the monitoring and development of the service. For example, annual surveys of people and their relatives. We saw actions were taken to address any issues that were raised.

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 registered manager and staff were clear in their understanding of the duty of candour and knew the action to take should something go wrong.

Continuous learning and improving care; working in partnership with others

- Professionals felt the service demonstrated good management and leadership, delivered good quality care and worked well in partnership with other agencies. They commented, "I haven't had any concerns over the care provided. They are quite innovative at times and self-sufficient in engaging clients to access opportunities in the community" and "Link Support are always willing to engage with other services as required to ensure outcomes are met for individuals".
- Staff said their managers were accessible and approachable and dealt effectively with any concerns they raised. A member of staff explained, "I have been working in care since 1996 and I have worked for both big and small providers. I can say that Link is one of the best managed providers in the country."
- People and their relatives felt the service was well managed. Relatives said the management listened and acted on what they said. One relative commented, "I only have good things to say about Link Support. I feel a very fortunate parent to have Link Support running the service and for my son to be part of it. They are all spiffing!"