

Mears Extra Care Limited

Mears Care - Bristol ECHS

Inspection report

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Date of inspection visit:
28 September 2020

Date of publication:
20 October 2020

Ratings

Overall rating for this service	Inspected but not rated
Is the service safe?	Inspected but not rated

Summary of findings

Overall summary

About the service

Mears Care provides personal care to people living in the Blaise Weston Extra Care Housing Scheme (ECHS). Personal care is also provided to people living in their own homes in the community.

Within the ECHS, people lived independently in their own flats. 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

This inspection was targeted at safety, in particular relating to staffing levels. People were positive about the care they received. There was an acknowledgment that there had been challenges relating to the pandemic. People understood that occasionally calls needed to be cut short to accommodate increased demands on staff's time due to the numbers of staff who had left the service or were isolating in line with government guidance. However, this hadn't impacted on people's safety. Comments included; "We never feel unsafe as the staff are wonderful. When calls have to be cut short it's sad because those girls do their best to get everything done and don't let us down.", "Staff support me very well indeed; I feel very good in myself and confident staff look after me in the correct manner" and "on a scale of one to 10, its 10 plus. I can't speak highly enough... (name of carer) and (name of carer), they're brilliant ... the care is second to none...very efficient....they have got to know (name)."

Rating at last inspection (and update)

There was a change in legal entity for the provider of this service in January 2020 and the service has not received a comprehensive inspection or rating since this change. This inspection did not result in a rating as it was a targeted inspection, looking specifically at issues in relation to safety and staffing.

The last rating for the service under the previous provider was Outstanding, published on 15 July 2017.

Why we inspected

The inspection was prompted due to concerns received about staffing levels and how these were impacting on the safety of people using the service. CQC had received whistleblowing information about this issue.

Follow up

We will continue to monitor information we receive about the service. If we receive any concerning information we may inspect again.

We will work alongside the provider and local authority to monitor progress.

The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

Is the service safe?

We have not provided a rating at this inspection. This is because we only looked at the parts of this key question we had specific concerns about.

Inspected but not rated

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Detailed findings

Background to this inspection

The inspection

This was a targeted inspection in response to concerns we'd received about safety and staffing levels

Inspection team

The inspection was carried out by one Inspector and two 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 in an extra care housing scheme. Extra care housing is purpose-built or adapted single household accommodation in a shared site or building. The accommodation is bought or rented and is the occupant's own home. People's care and housing are provided under separate contractual agreements. CQC does not regulate premises used for extra care housing; this inspection looked at people's personal care service.

Notice of inspection

We gave a short period notice of the inspection so that we could discuss and manage any risks relating to the pandemic, and also to make arrangements for people using the service to be contacted.

What we did before the inspection

We reviewed information we had received about the service through whistleblowing. We also shared concerns with the safeguarding team in the local authority.

During the inspection-

We spoke with nine members of staff, including six care staff, the deputy manager and the regional director. We reviewed records relating to accidents and incidents.

After the inspection

We spoke with the registered manager, who hadn't been able to be present on the day of the inspection. We spoke with 23 people in total across the ECHS and those receiving domiciliary care.

Is the service safe?

Our findings

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

This key question had not previously been rated under the current provider. We have not rated this key question, as we have only looked at the part of the key question we had specific concerns about.

Staffing and recruitment

- This inspection took place during the Covid 19 pandemic. The service had seen a number of staff leave the service, for varying reasons during this time. This had led to increased pressure on remaining staff. There were additional tasks arising directly from the pandemic that exacerbated these pressures. For example staff needing to take meals to people's rooms due the restaurant being out of use, and staff needing to deliver post to individual rooms to help maintain social distancing measures.
- The regional director told us that during this time, there were empty flats at the ECHS and also some people in hospital which had reduced the number of care hours required. This had mitigated some of the impact of the staff losses, however it was clear from talking with staff that the challenges of working through the pandemic had been very difficult and taken their toll on their morale and wellbeing. Staff told us it had been "very stressful" and described being under "constant pressure". Staff also expressed concern that due to the pressure and time constraints they were under, they had not always been able to deliver care in the person centred way they would have previously. This was in part due to the fact that social distancing restrictions meant that there were less social activities taking place. The social aspects of the service had been very important to people and staff and it was clear that this was missed and affecting people's wellbeing.
- Coinciding with the onset of the pandemic, there had also been a restructure in the staffing arrangements, with a reduction in the number of senior staff on duty at one time. Staff expressed concern about the impact this would have, particularly on occasions when they had to deal with urgent situations. They told us that with senior staff on duty, there was capacity for them to help manage the emergency and carry out the other care calls that were due. Prior to the inspection, we had received whistleblowing giving specific examples of when staff had dealt with an emergency and felt the situation had been unsafe due to staffing levels. These were discussed with the regional director prior to the inspection and a satisfactory response given. We were told that there was always a senior member of staff on call to provide support. No further example of emergency situations were provided during our inspection; staff felt overall that people had been kept safe due to the efforts of staff working hard to cover the care people needed.
- The regional director acknowledged that there had been times when calls had been cut short, by a maximum of 15 minutes to ensure that all calls were covered. A risk rating system had been used to decide on calls that could be cut without risking people's safety and this had been discussed with commissioners of the service.
- Senior staff acknowledged that the service had been through a very difficult period, with a number of factors playing a part in staff feeling discontented, however they were keen to move the service forward. New staff had been recruited and the registered manager told us that they anticipated being in a much stronger position by the end of November with sufficient staff to manage the number of care hours required, safely without having to rely on current staff working extra hours.

- Staff told us that they had not always felt well supported over the course of the pandemic. This was due to the fact that by necessity, senior staff were working from home and not on site to provide hands on, or face to face support. Senior staff told us there had been measures in place to support staff by phone and that staff efforts had been acknowledged through rewards such as vouchers. However, it was clear that morale amongst the staff team remained low and that potentially this could impact on retention of staff.

We recommend that the provider reviews their support systems for staff to ensure they feel confident and able to carry out their roles effectively and safely.

- Comments from people using the service demonstrated that they were aware of the pressures that staff were under but this had not directly impacted on their safety or care. We received the following comments from people in the ECHS; "When the Covid crisis started we didn't know if we were going to be alive the next day and these girls worked themselves into the ground to ensure everyone was catered for.", "During this quarantine time staff have never missed a visit, the majority of the time carers are on time but don't always ring to tell me if they're going to be late.", "I'm epileptic and had quite a few falls in the last months and staff have been able to help me and get my memory back.", "Staff are on time as well as can be expected because of short care resources, having the size of a building like this – it's inevitable that they're going to be late but staff do their utmost best to adapt and break up times to cater for everyone's needs."
- People using the domiciliary care service told us; "brilliant, absolutely brilliant", "the care is very good... the ones they got are good but there's not enough", "visits are cut short...they're always off sick particularly at the weekend... there are different people every day and I don't like that..."
- We will continue to monitor the service to ensure they are making progress in recruitment and that their staffing levels are safe.