

Kensington Hall

Enter and View Report

20th November 2025



Disclaimer: This report relates only to the service viewed at the time of the visit and is only representative of the views of the staff, visitors and residents who met members of the Enter and View team on that date.

Visit information



Service address:

Front Street
South Hetton
County Durham
DH6 2TG



Service provider

Pontensial Limited



Service manager

Joy Kerr



Date of visit

Thursday 20th November 2025



CQC rating

Requires improvement



Healthwatch County Durham Enter and View Officer

Claire Sisterson



Authorised representatives

Rosemary Chessum
Paulette Burgess

Introduction

Our role at Healthwatch County Durham is to gather people's views and experiences, especially those that are seldom heard, to give them the opportunity to express how they feel about a service. The aim of an Enter and View visit is to gather views and experiences of residents, relatives and staff of a service and observe the environment to assess the quality of the service.

This was an announced Enter and View visit undertaken by authorised representatives who have the authority to enter health and social care premises, announced or unannounced. The team collate feedback gathered and observations made to compile a report. The report identifies aspects of good practice as well as possible areas of improvement. Healthwatch County Durham is an independent organisation, therefore we do not make judgements or express personal opinions, but rely on feedback received and objective observations of the environment. The report is sent to the manager for their opportunity to respond before being published on the Healthwatch County Durham website at www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk.

Where appropriate, Healthwatch County Durham may arrange a revisit to check the progress of improvements. The report is available to the Care Quality Commission, Healthwatch England and any other relevant organisations.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch County Durham would like to thank management, staff, residents and relatives, for making us feel welcome and for taking the time to speak to us during the visit.



General Information

Kensington Hall is a registered care home for adults with a learning disability, autism or complex needs. They can accommodate 13 residents and all bedrooms have ensuite facilities. There is a communal lounge, dining area, garden and BBQ area as well as a lift for improved accessibility to the second floor where 9 bedrooms are located.

There are eight full time members of staff and one part time, all staff are support workers and carry out all tasks, including cleaning and cooking.

Methodology

Healthwatch County Durham made an announced visit on Thursday 20th November.

Two weeks prior to the Enter and View visit, we publicised our visit by leaving a display about Healthwatch County Durham and details of our visit. In order to capture as many residents and their families as possible, we left surveys and a 'post box' to be completed and left for our return.

We spoke extensively with the manager to ensure we could best meet the needs of the residents and enable them to share their experiences. We asked residents about four areas of their care - communication, environment, social preferences and staff and service. We created an easy read version of the survey and also used visual prompts and emoji faces to gain insight into specific areas of the service. The team also recorded their own observations on the environment and staff member interactions. Interviews were conducted one to one, and where necessary, staff assisted with communication. All responses were recorded anonymously.

To retain confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, any identifiable details have been removed from quotes.

Unfortunately, at the time of our visit, there had been a flood which was being fixed; this meant the water was switched off. During this time there was no heating, running water or flushable toilets. Staff were calm but a little distracted in trying to organise a prompt repair. They also had to manage alternative arrangements, which they did well (for example-access to water-they had already gone and purchased bottled water, accessed additional blankets and clothing for the residents because of the lack of heating).

Summary

Feedback from residents and staff at Kensington Hall reflects a generally positive and supportive environment, with good relationships, personalised care, and a homely atmosphere emerging as consistent strengths. Residents frequently described staff as friendly, attentive, and respectful, highlighting the value of social connections and the reassurance provided by familiar staff members. Many spoke positively about their rooms, daily routines, and the wide range of activities available, all of which contributed to feelings of wellbeing, choice, and independence.

Staff feedback reinforced this picture, emphasising a warm, welcoming environment in which residents are encouraged to personalise their spaces, engage in meaningful activities, and maintain their independence. Staff reported feeling supported by management and committed to understanding each resident's individual needs, from communication styles to personal preferences.

Alongside this positive feedback, some areas for development were identified. A small number of residents reported mixed or negative experiences with specific staff members, with one resident feeling accused of lying and another suggesting they were "in trouble" for raising concerns. These isolated experiences suggest that while the overall culture is supportive, individual interactions may vary and would benefit from continued monitoring to ensure consistency.

A few residents also indicated they were not fully involved in decisions about their care or did not understand the reasons behind their placement, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen person-centred communication and involvement in planning. Additionally, some residents expressed a desire for more opportunities to go out into the community.

Environmental feedback was mostly positive, though one resident was unhappy with their room. Temporary disruption due to a radiator repair limited a complete assessment of the environment on the day of the visit.

Overall, Kensington Hall is viewed as a warm, caring, and engaging home where residents feel safe, valued, and supported. Continued attention to individual communication experiences, resident involvement in decision-making, and opportunities for increased community engagement would further strengthen the quality of care.

Findings

Resident feedback

Communication...

Residents at Kensington Hall spoke about the friendships they had formed with both staff and fellow residents. One individual shared that she did not feel lonely because staff regularly took time to talk and spend time with her. Social connections emerged as a key theme, with many residents expressing the importance of these relationships when we discussed communication.

One resident, who had recently moved to Kensington Hall following the death of her mother, expressed difficulty in settling in. She mentioned feeling comfortable talking to one particular staff member and described most staff as “nice,” although she referred to one as “horrible.” Unfortunately, we were unable to determine the reason behind this perception.

Some residents gave the impression that they were not fully involved in decisions about their care. One resident told us she did not know why she was living at Kensington Hall. We also heard that social workers do not always speak directly with residents about their care needs, and instead communicate primarily with the home on the resident’s behalf.

On the day of our visit, five of the residents present were non-verbal. We observed staff using body language, verbal sounds, and cues to understand individual needs. Staff demonstrated attentiveness by recognising when a resident was unhappy with a process and when they were content, which appeared to come from their familiarity with, and understanding of, each individual.

“The staff take time to talk to me from time to time too, I’m certainly not lonely”

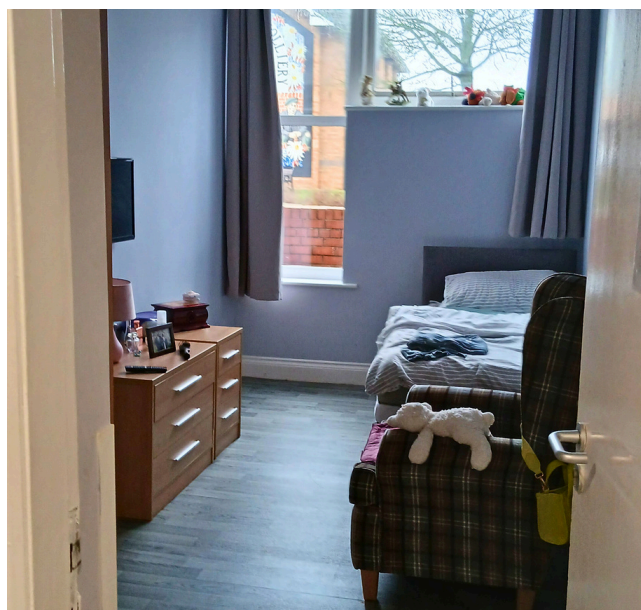
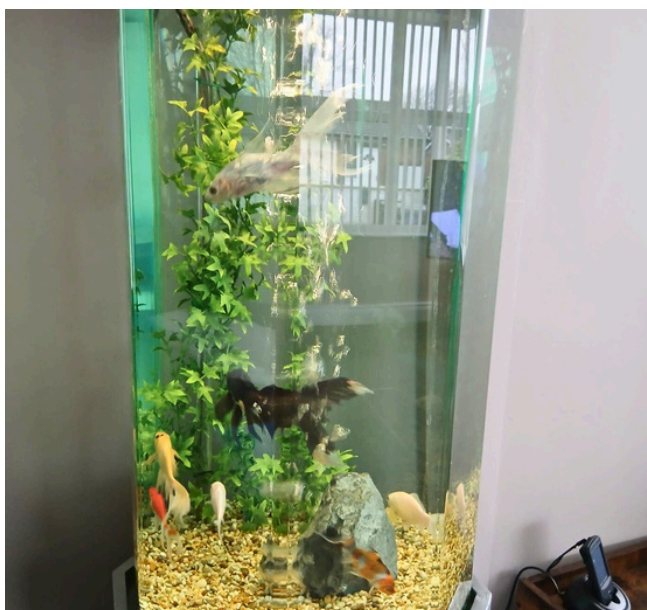
Environment...

Residents generally appeared satisfied with their rooms and were keen to show them to us. One resident proudly shared that his room was located at the “posh end” of the building, overlooking the road. Although he mentioned that traffic could sometimes be noisy, he enjoyed listening to the birds outside. Another resident highlighted the amount of natural light in her room and said she appreciated the sunshine streaming in. However, one resident told us she did not like her room and felt it was not how she wanted it.

Residents also expressed positive views about the home overall, describing it as “nice and warm” and stating that their needs were met. They mentioned accessible bathrooms, availability of medical equipment, and staff responsiveness to medical requirements.

One resident reported that his television was broken but had informed staff and was waiting for it to be repaired. During our visit, the maintenance team was on-site addressing damage caused by a recent flood.

We were unable to get a full picture of the environment as the heating was turned off along with the water whilst the broken radiator was repaired. However, this was being prioritised and the work was being carried out promptly.



Social Preferences...

Residents appeared to have choice in both their daily activities and food preferences, which helped promote a sense of control and independence. During our visit, residents were proud to show us their creative work, several had made Christmas stockings which encouraged self-expression and a sense of achievement. We heard that quizzes, crafts, trips to Dalton Park for shopping, and dancing events in West Hartlepool are organised regularly, and residents look forward to these opportunities for social interaction.

Meal times are flexible. Although there is a set menu, residents can decline the option and request something different, and snacks are available throughout the day. Staff demonstrated awareness of individual preferences, including portion sizes. They were attentive to residents' needs, helping ensure people feel heard and respected.

One resident shared that she would like a singer to visit and perform, as she particularly enjoys pop music.

Overall, residents seemed to enjoy the social aspects of life at Kensington Hall, which support wellbeing, choice, and enjoyment. However, some residents expressed a desire to go out more and to have increased opportunities to participate in the wider community. One resident spoke about the emotional impact of her disability, describing how frustrating she found it at times. With additional support and encouragement, she may benefit from strategies or activities that help her overcome some of these frustrations, and the home could explore further ways to assist her in building confidence and independence.



“I prefer pyjamas and I like to go to bed about 8:30 in the evening. When I want to go to bed I shout for the staff and they come and do that for me”

“ [I] don't go out much but would like to, however I'm looking forward to a couple of days in Blackpool tomorrow”

Staff/service..

Residents generally spoke warmly about the staff at Kensington Hall, describing them as friendly, helpful, and supportive. Several residents told us that staff assisted them with day-to-day tasks, such as packing suitcases and doing laundry, and that they felt staff acted in their best interests. Many residents appeared comfortable and well cared for, with staff offering encouragement in a reassuring and respectful manner. One resident, who has limited family contact, shared that the kindness of staff and residents helped reduce feelings of loneliness.

However, alongside this positive feedback, a small number of comments highlighted potential concerns. One resident reported feeling they were often “in trouble” for “telling tales” about their support worker, another described a member of staff as “horrible” and someone who had accused them of lying. This same resident had recently moved to Kensington Hall and was finding it difficult to settle in. Despite their negative experience with one staff member, they also identified another member of staff they felt comfortable speaking with and described forming an early trusting relationship. This mixed feedback suggests that, while positive connections are developing, individual experiences with staff may vary and should be monitored.

“I am happy with the staff, they are very friendly”

“I'm happy, I'm never not happy here”

Staff feedback

All feedback from staff, except one individual, was through surveys left for us to collect.

Communication

All staff spoke fondly of being able to spend time with residents and get to know them and their personalities. We heard staff will adapt to patients communication needs and ensure residents have understood what is happening. A residents meeting is organised once a week for residents to talk about any concerns they want to raise or give feedback, this space should lead to trust with the service and mean issues are dealt with early. Staff told us about the importance of communicating with residents families and other professionals who may assist with their care helping to keep continuation of care.

“We talk about the past, the history, and about their feelings, if any of the residents can't communicate we find a way to interact with them”

“We also have a residence meeting once a week where they can give their feedback on things and if they have any issues or concerns that staff or management are always here to listen”

Environment

Staff see Kensington Hall as having a warm and welcoming feel for residents, who are encouraged to personalise their rooms and create a comfortable environment for themselves. Staff see the space as relaxed and socialising is encouraged, with activities such as colouring, listening to music and chatting being listed in the dining room to help foster meaningful relationships with staff and residents.

Safety and wellbeing are carefully balanced with residents independence. The use of the garden is encouraged with safety measures in place such as locking the gates and staff supervision.

Overall, Kensington Hall is seen as being safe, warm and empowering to residents, enabling them to feel at home, supported and respected.

“It's welcoming and warm, they have everything they want from food to helping with things around the home, making them feel like they have a voice”

“The best thing about the care home is we are one big happy family”

“The home has a really homely feel its relaxed environment with homely decorations and furnishings”

Social Preferences

The staff showcased a strong knowledge of residents preferences, from who enjoys Elvis to who prefers tea over coffee and we heard all residents enjoy a barbeque. Staff consistently demonstrated personalised, individualised care and made every effort to cater for all their needs.

Although none of the residents had any specific cultural or religious needs, staff actively encouraged them to share their views and were happy to discuss a wide variety of topics with residents. Staff dedicated time to getting to know residents well and ensured their care plans were up to date with all their preferences. This supported residents to feel, heard, valued and respected which promoted a strong sense of identity and wellbeing.

Staff organised regular days out and activities to encourage socialising, independence and variety for residents. For example, on Fridays, the residents are taken to a disco where they can dance, socialise and enjoy physical exercise. These opportunities have a positive impact on residents confidence, physical health and emotional wellbeing, whilst reducing social isolation.

Food times and preferences are flexible, with residents able to access snacks at any time between meals and alternative options readily available. This provided the residents with choice, supporting independence and satisfaction with their care.

“We learn about each resident when we start as they all enjoy different things and are always encouraged to do the things they like”

“Some like bigger meals some prefer smaller ones, they have singers come and people come in with animals which they all love”

“Residents can ask to do activities or the staff ask what they would like, we have games, arts and crafts, the happiness table, gardening, painting, domino's, we have a wide variety, we have regular trips out, and some go to the cathedral to take part in the Nativity at Christmas”



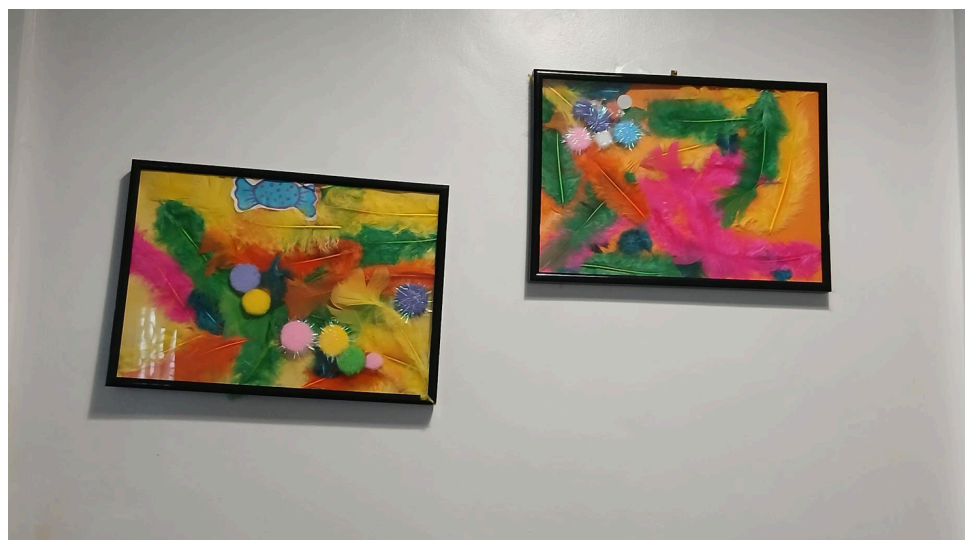
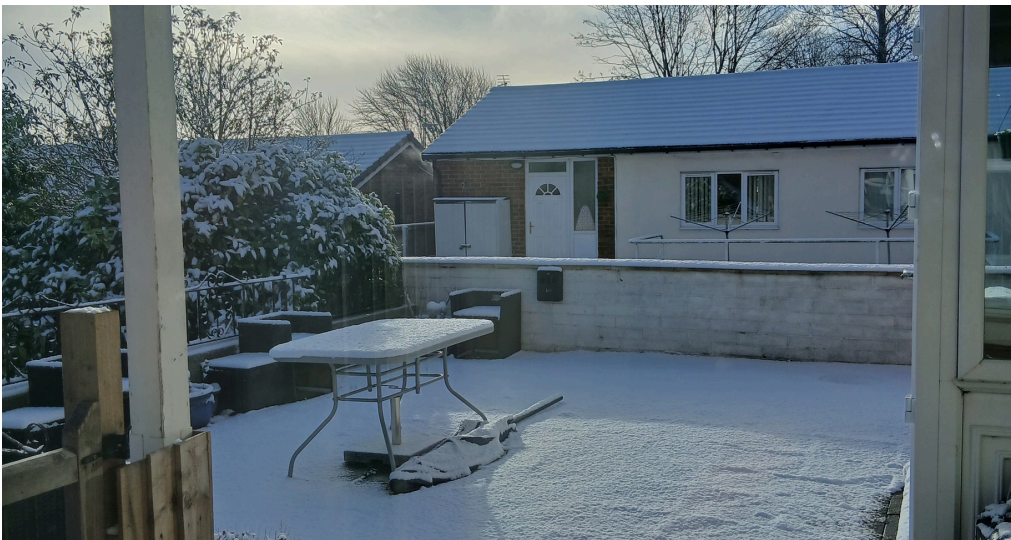
Staff/Service

Staff are welcoming and friendly, and this is reflected in how both residents and their families enjoy chatting with them and getting to know them. We heard that staff and management are very supportive of each other, as well as open and approachable, helping residents feel they can speak up and will be listened to. Residents' meetings are a good example of how the service encourages people to share their views, make suggestions, and express what they would like, all of which supports independence and personal choice.

Staff also spoke about feeling supported by management and valued in their roles, which contributes to job satisfaction and makes their work feel rewarding.

"I do feel valued and we definitely are supported, we have a good team and the management's brilliant, I feel this type of work is very rewarding"

"Residents know all the staff and come to us for chats"



Recommendations

Whilst there is a recognition that individuals may have some form of learning disability, that does not define their ability to share their feelings, beliefs, and experiences, even where that contradicts other people's experience.

The following recommendations have been formulated based on observations of the environment and feedback gathered from residents, relatives and staff.

1. Strengthen Person-Centred Communication and Involvement

- Ensure residents are fully involved in decisions about their care, including regular conversations about why they live at the home, their goals, and their preferences.
- Introduce simple, accessible care-planning sessions (e.g. monthly "My Care, My Choice" chats) for residents who are able to participate.
- Ensure social workers and other visiting professionals communicate directly with residents using accessible methods.
- Use a consistent communication approach across staff, especially for non-verbal residents, including signing, communication passports, and personalised cues.

2. Improve Consistency of Staff Interactions

- Provide refresher training on trauma-informed, empathetic communication, particularly for new or less experienced staff, to reduce the risk of residents feeling blamed, accused, or "in trouble."
- Implement a system for early escalation if a resident reports feeling uncomfortable with a staff member, enabling quick resolution.
- Increase reflective supervision sessions, allowing staff to discuss challenges and receive coaching on resident relationships.

3. Enhance Support for Residents Who Struggle to Settle

- Develop a "New Resident Welcome Plan", including a key-worker introduction, buddy system, and structured check-ins over the first 4–6 weeks.
- Identify residents who may be grieving, anxious, or socially isolated, and offer targeted emotional support, such as counselling sessions, befriending, or additional key-worker time.
- Ensure new residents understand house routines, activities, and who they can approach for help.

4. Expand Social and Community Engagement

- Increase opportunities for trips outside the home, prioritising residents who expressed a desire to go out more.
- Introduce themed entertainment and guest performers (e.g. singers, musicians), reflecting resident preferences such as pop music.
- Partner with local community groups and venues to broaden opportunities for social participation.
- Create personalised "activity plans" for residents experiencing frustration due to disability, including confidence-building goals, sensory activities, or supported outings.

5. Maintain a High-Quality Environment

- Conduct an accessibility audit focusing on visual supports, signage, sensory comfort, and predictable routines.
- Ask residents how they feel about their rooms using accessible tools, such as emotion cards or photos, especially where verbal communication is limited.
- Strengthen proactive maintenance checks (e.g., TVs, lighting, sensory equipment) so residents don't experience long waits.

6. Continue to Build on Strong Staff–Resident Relationships

- Celebrate positive staff practice by sharing good-news stories, resident quotes, and examples of personalised care in team meetings.
- Ensure all staff have protected time each shift to engage socially with residents, supporting trust and emotional wellbeing.
- Promote peer learning, with experienced staff modelling strong communication and person-centred approaches for newer colleagues.

7. Enhance Feedback and Advocacy

- Use accessible feedback tools, such as:
 - emotion symbols
 - talking mats
 - photos
 - objects of reference
- Ensure each resident knows how to raise a concern, with visual prompts displayed around the home.
- Involve independent advocates to support residents through care reviews or when they have concerns about staff interactions.
- Make resident meetings more accessible, using visuals, simplified agendas, and choices that are clearly explained.
- Encourage families to contribute feedback, especially around communication and involvement in care decisions.

8. Promote Independence and Choice

- Create visual activity timetables personalised for each resident.
- Develop independence goals (e.g., making small snacks, choosing clothes, managing small purchases on outings).
- Allow maximum autonomy in daily routines, such as bedtime, food choices, clothing preferences, and social activities.

Provider response

We are extremely grateful to Co Durham Healthwatch for offering this Enter & View visit. This is the first one they have undertaken with us, and we find it a very good and useful way to access service user feedback. I would recommend any Co Durham care home to consider having Healthwatch undertake an Enter & View visit. Thank you also to all the residents, family members, carers and staff who responded to the survey and who answered questions before the visit or on the day.

Feedback on comments/recommendations/highlights/improvements made

1. Strengthen Person-Centred Communication and Involvement

Every month all of the people that we support have a monthly meeting with their key worker, key workers are allocated to the people we support by their choice. In these meetings their care and concerns are discussed. All of the people we support who have visiting professionals / family are present when these meetings take place their needs and concerns are discussed and explained in full. On occasions telephone calls are taken by the staff but any information is explained in full to both the person and the family. We will work on developing further communication skills. All of the people that we support have a communication passport

2. Improve Consistency of Staff Interactions

All staff have received training in communication; we will source trauma – informed empathetic communication will be sourced. If any of the people that we support feel uncomfortable then early staff intervention will be discussed with PBS facilitator and strategies will be implemented. Supervisions take place every eight weeks and an open door policy has been implemented

3. Enhance Support for Residents Who Struggle to Settle

A service user guide is in place for all new people moving into Kensington Hall and a key worker is allocated initially however this changes as the person decides who they would like as their personal key worker and this usually depends on which staff member, they have the strongest bond with. All new people moving into Kensington Hall have a full core assessment any emotional support, counselling, and befriending or any extra one to one time is discussed and organized at this time, any additional needs identified after this period is discussed and arranged with the persons care manager. We ensure that any new person moving into Kensington Hall comes for visits to enable a smooth transition, this will enable the person time to get to know the house routines and give them the opportunity to mix with their peers. Open door policy ensures that both staff and the people we support along with any family members have the opportunity to take time out and discuss any problems they may be facing

4. Expand Social and Community Engagement

Opportunity to access the community are ongoing in the next month we have organized a trip to Chester Zoo, Emmerdale tour, Coronation Street tour, three of the people that we support have requested a holiday to Disney Land Paris which is in the process of being arranged. Performers visit the service on a regular basis; animal therapy sessions are also held. The service partners with innovation and Mencap who hold theme nights every two weeks. An activity wall has been implemented and the people we support choose what activities they would like to participate in and we demonstrate this on a picture wall each month. We use the happiness table for sensory activities, and we have created a journal for each person to map their own personal goals.

5. Maintain a High-Quality Environment

All of the people that we support choose the decoration and furniture in their own rooms. We will continue to work on developing further communication skills. Picture boards are now in place, and these will be changed monthly. We will continue to work on personal journals creating a confidence goal building trail for each person. We will continue to ensure that all repairs are reported immediately.

6. Continue to Build on Strong Staff-Resident Relationships

We share good news stories monthly and all good news stories are shared with the company's media and is shared on the company's social media page. Person centred care is embedded into the service and the staff have developed a service values statement

7. Enhance Feedback and Advocacy

We will continue to work on developing further communication skills. All of the people that we support have visual complaints procedure this will be displayed throughout the service, and a copy will be held with the safeguarding information which is displayed on the wall. The People we support have weekly meetings and these meetings are held using simple agendas. Families are encouraged to complete service feedback form which are kept at the front door. All family members are included in decision making concerning their family members

8. Promote Independence and Choice

A visual activity board is in the process of being developed, all of the people that we support are consulted on food choices, clothing preferences and social activities. We will continue to develop social skills and independence

Joy Kerr (Care Home Manager)

healthwatch

County Durham

Healthwatch County Durham

Unit 3, Crook Business Centre

New Road

Crook

DL15 8QX

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk


t: 0300 180 0025


e: info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

 [Facebook.com/HealthwatchCountyDurham](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchCountyDurham)

 [instagram.com/Healthwatchcodurham](https://www.instagram.com/Healthwatchcodurham)

 [X.com/HWCountyDurham](https://www.x.com/HWCountyDurham)

 [Linkedin.com/Healthwatch County Durham](https://www.linkedin.com/Healthwatch County Durham)