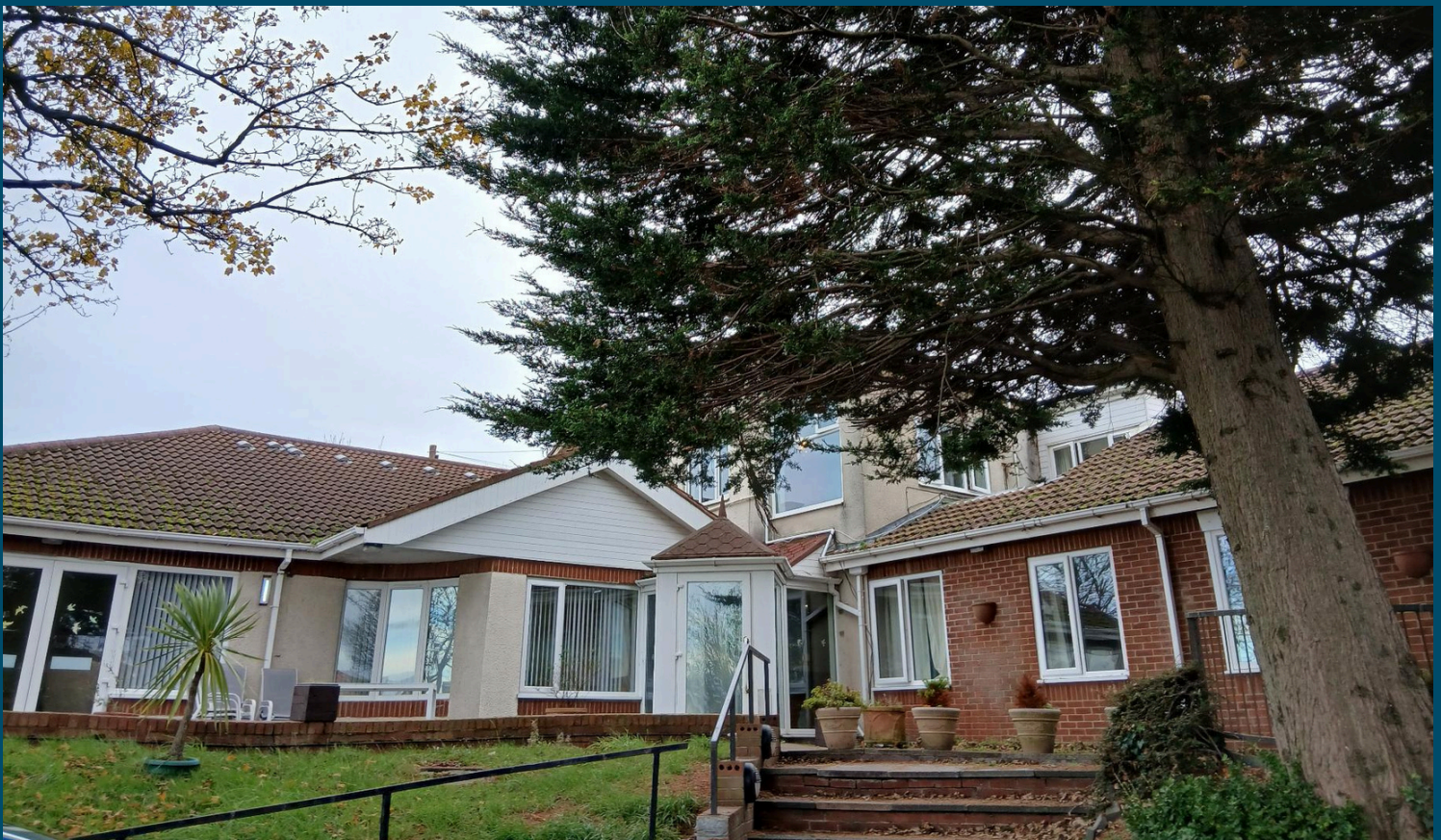


Dr. Ashdown's Stockton Lodge

Enter and View Report

16th March 2026



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:

Seaton Park
Stockton Road
Seaham
SR7 0HJ



Service provider

Seaham Care Limited



Service manager

Nikita Scollen



Date of visit

Monday 16th March 2026
12.30pm - 3.30 pm



CQC rating

Rated as good in March 2023.



Healthwatch County Durham Enter and View Officer

Claire Sisterson



Authorised representatives

Judi Evans - Volunteer
Anne Glynn - Volunteer

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 for 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

Dr. Ashdown's Stockton Lodge is a purpose built residential care home for older adults with and without dementia. There are 40 bedrooms, at the time of the report 33 were occupied. Dr. Ashdown's Stockton Lodge consists of three units offering a combination of residential, nursing care and a unit dedicated to support challenging behaviour. The care home employs approximately 40 members of staff, including a cook, handyman and activity coordinator. CQC inspected the property in March 2023 and rated it as good.

Methodology

The Enter and View representatives made an announced visit on Monday 16th March 2026. We received 15 pieces of feedback in total regarding residents. 11 from residents themselves, three from relatives and one from a visitor. Of the resident surveys, four were completed in writing and left in the post box, two of which made us aware they had assistance from a staff member. Nine staff members also contributed from a variety of roles.

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.

During our preparations there was a managerial crossover - the outgoing and incoming managers held slightly different views on how far and how quickly support arrangements could be adjusted to improve the service but both agreed about the need to enhance the outdoor space through targeted spend and on developing transport provision to enable residents to get out and about in a person centered way.

We spoke extensively with both managers to ensure we could best meet the needs of the residents and enable them to share their experiences. We asked residents about 4 areas of their care; communication, environment, social preferences and the 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.

Of the residents we spoke with we recorded 10 were female and 3 male. Staff respondents included support workers, care assistants, healthcare assistants and a nurse.

Summary

The feedback received reflects a caring and generally positive experience for residents, relatives, and staff within the home. Communication is widely described as respectful, supportive, and person-centred, with residents feeling listened to, informed, and involved in their care. Staff are praised for adapting their communication to individual needs and for building positive relationships with both residents and families.

The home is seen as warm, welcoming, and homely, with personalised bedrooms and a friendly atmosphere that helps residents feel safe and comfortable. Residents value the kindness of staff, opportunities for activities, and visits from family, friends, church groups, and the wider community. Staff are recognised for their compassionate approach, teamwork, and commitment to residents' wellbeing.

Residents' social preferences are generally well supported, with flexible food and drink choices and a varied programme of activities available. The activities coordinator received particularly positive feedback for creating engaging opportunities for residents to socialise and participate in meaningful activities.

Some areas for improvement were identified. A small number of residents expressed feelings of boredom, isolation, or disorientation, highlighting the importance of regular one-to-one interaction and emotional support. Concerns were also raised about limited access to outdoor spaces and the lack of dedicated transport for community outings. Staffing pressures, particularly within the dementia unit, were mentioned at times, alongside occasional concerns about housekeeping communication and consistency.

Overall, the feedback reflects a caring and committed service that provides a supportive and welcoming environment, while recognising opportunities to further strengthen social engagement, outdoor access, and consistency across all areas of care.

Findings

Communication...

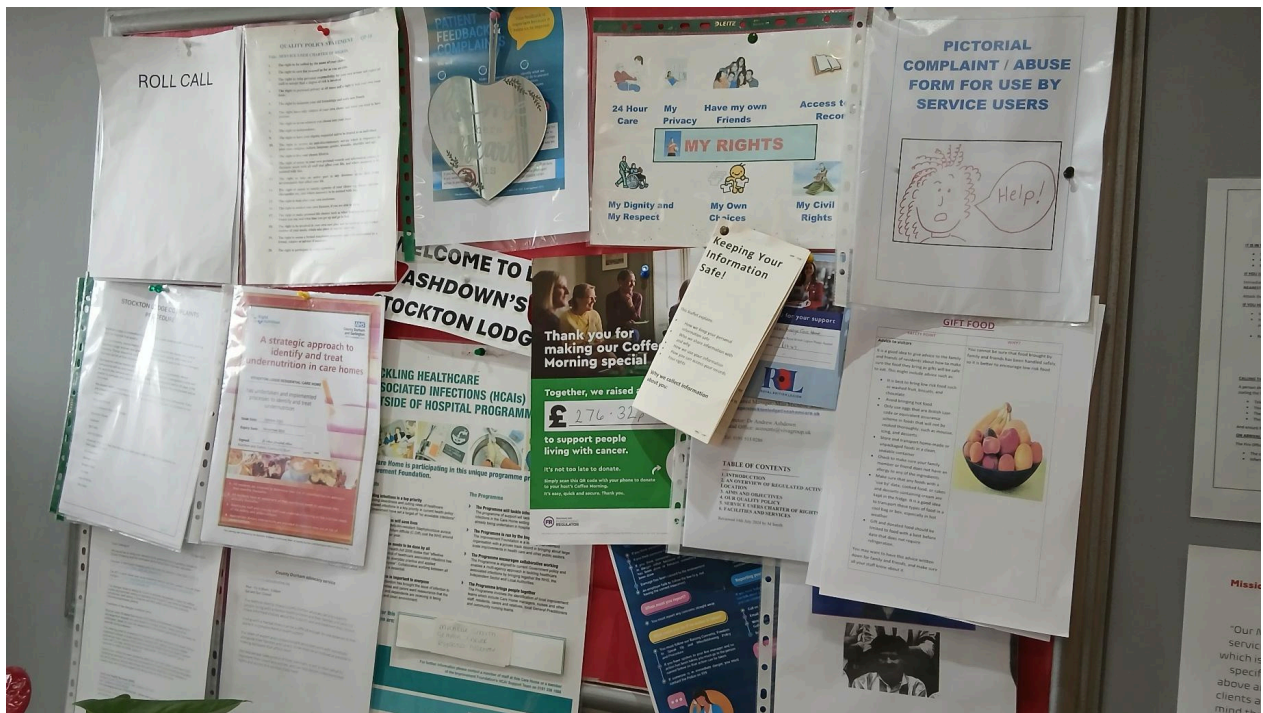
Communication at the care home is generally positive by residents, relatives, and visitors. Staff are described as approachable, respectful, and responsive, listening carefully, answering questions clearly, and encouraging residents to share their views and concerns. Residents feel informed, involved in their care, and able to access information when needed.

Staff adapt communication to individual needs, including supporting residents with hearing impairments or limited verbal communication. Visitors and family members report positive experiences and confidence in the staff.

Some areas for improvement were identified. One resident expressed feelings of boredom, disorientation, and social isolation, highlighting the importance of regular engagement and orientation support. Another resident felt that staff could sometimes be less receptive to criticism or concerns. Additionally, one staff member raised concerns about communication and training among housekeeping staff.

“Everything is explained clearly and I am able to say if I am not understanding anything”

“It's very boring here It can be very repetitious which is difficult because I sometimes feel quite disorganized I don't know what day of the week it is”



Environment...

The care home is generally described as warm, welcoming, and homely. Residents appreciate their comfortable, personalised bedrooms and the friendly, family-like atmosphere created by staff. Many value being able to maintain independence and enjoy activities, visits from family, friends, and community groups.

Positive feedback highlighted the home's cleanliness, comfort, and supportive environment, with residents feeling safe and well cared for. Access to personal belongings helps residents feel settled and at home.

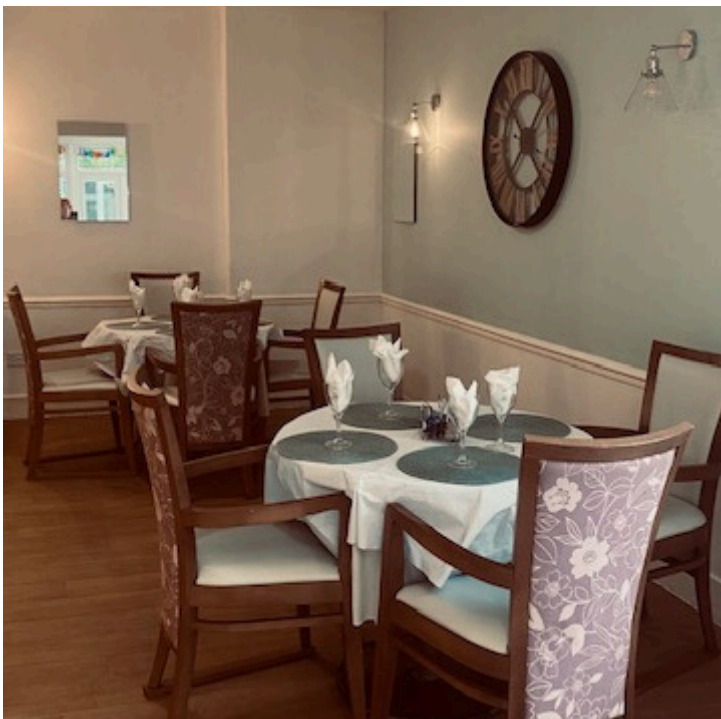
Some concerns were raised regarding the outdoor space, which was described as limited, uneven, and not easily accessible. One bedroom was noted to require improved cleanliness and odour control. A resident also expressed a wish for greater inclusion and stronger relationships between staff and residents.

Overall, the environment is welcoming and comfortable, with opportunities to further enhance outdoor areas and ensure consistently high standards throughout the home.

"It's comfortable and cozy rooms"

"The team at Stockton Lodge are like a family"

"I'm not going out in the fresh air as much as I would like to"



Social Preferences...

Residents' social preferences are understood and generally well supported. They are offered regular refreshments throughout the day, and staff are aware of individual food preferences, likes, and dislikes. Most residents speak positively about the food, although one resident felt it did not always meet her personal standards. One resident expressed concern about arguments and conflict; however, this appeared consistent with the individual's known behavioural presentation, as reflected by their placement within the care home's challenging behaviour unit.

A varied programme of activities is available, and residents enjoy taking part while also having their need for personal space respected. The activities coordinator was praised for being engaging, approachable, and attentive. The choir had visited on the day of inspection, which was clearly enjoyed by residents, and regular visits from church groups are highly valued.

Residents appreciate opportunities for social interaction, outings, and community involvement. However, concerns were raised about the lack of dedicated transport, which has limited opportunities for external trips and outings. Some residents would also welcome more one-to-one interaction and increased access to community activities, including church attendance.

"I am able to receive hot or cold beverages in the home at any time"

"It has taken seven years we've been promised transport for activities for all of that time and it hasn't happened"



Staff and service...

Staff are described as caring, approachable, and supportive. Residents and relatives praised their kindness, flexibility, and willingness to go above and beyond, whether providing emotional support, assisting with shopping, or responding quickly to individual needs. Staff were observed interacting warmly with residents and actively participating in activities.

Many residents feel well supported and value the positive relationships they have with staff. Relatives also expressed confidence in the quality of care provided. Staff are seen as engaging, friendly, and committed to residents' wellbeing.

Some residents would welcome more one-to-one conversation and informal interaction with staff. There were also comments about staffing levels, particularly within the dementia unit, where staff were described as very busy at times. One resident felt unable to raise concerns about aspects of her care, such as food choices or family relationships.

“All the staff are helpful here they had a good sense of humor and they help where they can I can't complain”

“Maybe they could take her out though, especially as her care is costing [over £2000] per week”



Staff feedback

Communication

Staff described communication as a key part of providing effective care to their residents and demonstrated a strong commitment to listening to residents and their families. They emphasised the importance of clear, compassionate, and respectful communication to help residents feel reassured, involved, and understood.

Staff spoke about adapting their communication to meet individual needs, including using communication aids, body language, photographs, reassurance, and alternative approaches for residents who may be anxious, non-verbal, or have difficulty understanding. They highlighted the importance of giving residents time to respond and ensuring their preferences and choices are respected.

Communication with families was also seen as important, with staff regularly providing updates on residents' wellbeing, appointments, and any changes in needs. Staff recognised the value of involving families to support residents emotionally and maintain continuity of care.

Overall, staff demonstrated a person-centred approach to communication, with a clear focus on patience, inclusion, reassurance, and understanding individual needs.

"I look at things like body language and I know from differences in behaviour, for example if somebody is in pain or upset there will be a different behaviour even if they are nonverbal"

"Communication is one of the key elements in my mind"

Environment

Staff described the home as warm, welcoming, and homely, with a strong focus on personalisation and creating a comfortable environment for residents. Bedrooms are personalised with photographs, meaningful belongings, and familiar items to help residents feel settled and maintain connections to their life history and identity.

Staff highlighted the positive atmosphere within the home, describing it as friendly, caring, and community focused. Residents are encouraged to socialise, reminisce, enjoy music, and take part in activities that reflect their interests and preferences. Quiet spaces and one-to-one support are also available for residents who may feel anxious or distressed.

Access to outdoor spaces and fresh air is encouraged where possible, with some residents able to go outside into the home's external spaces with family, staff, or independently. However, some limitations were noted within specialist units, where residents' safety needs and behaviours can restrict freedom of movement and require additional environmental controls.

"The home aims to apply a homely feel to the environment by making areas individualized to the residents their life and their history"

"The management encourages every resident to personalise their rooms"



Social Preferences

Staff demonstrated a strong understanding of residents' social preferences and described a person-centred approach to care. Individual care plans are used to record residents' likes, dislikes, routines, beliefs, hobbies, and life histories. Care plans are updated monthly, helping staff provide personalised support that reflects each resident's needs and preferences.

Residents are encouraged to take part in a wide range of activities, including music, quizzes, crafts, dancing, singing, church services and choir visits. Staff highlighted the importance of social interaction, reminiscence, and meaningful engagement, with activities adapted to residents' interests and abilities. Religious and cultural beliefs are respected, with regular visits from clergy and opportunities for worship available.

Food and drink provision is described as highly flexible and responsive to individual choice. Although there are set mealtimes, residents can access snacks, drinks, and meals whenever they wish, including freshly prepared alternatives for those who wake later or prefer smaller portions. Staff work closely with families to understand residents' preferences and ensure these are reflected in daily care.

"I know all residents preferences as I read and update the care plans monthly and sit and chat to residents and families"

"There are mealtimes throughout the day but a resident can be given food whenever they want"

Staff/Service

Staff described positive and supportive relationships with residents, families, and colleagues. Residents are familiar with staff members, often recognising them by name, voice, or appearance, and staff take time to chat, provide reassurance, and build trusting relationships. Staff highlighted the importance of being patient advocates and supporting residents' emotional wellbeing through regular interaction and person-centred care.

Relationships with families were also viewed positively, with staff providing updates and maintaining open communication during visits. Many staff described the home as friendly, welcoming, and team focused, with management seen as approachable, appreciative, and supportive. Staff frequently reported feeling valued, recognised for their work, and part of a close-knit team.

Several staff members spoke positively about job satisfaction and the rewarding nature of supporting residents to feel happy, comfortable, and engaged. Staff also highlighted the importance of teamwork, experience, and maintaining a positive atmosphere within the home.

One staff member reported not always feeling valued or supported, although this was not a widely shared view. Overall, feedback reflected a caring and committed staff team that is motivated to provide high-quality, person-centred care.

"We always get thanked for the hard work and it never go's unnoticed"

"I always remain positive around residents and enjoy them smiling and being happy, I enjoy my job and I get satisfaction seeing residents happy smiling and interacting"

Recommendations

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

- Improve the outdoor environment to ensure it is safe, accessible, and fully fit for purpose. Areas of uneven ground should be repaired or resurfaced to reduce trip hazards and improve access for residents with mobility needs. Consider creating more inviting outdoor seating and activity areas to encourage residents to spend time in fresh air safely and comfortably.
- Increase opportunities for meaningful one-to-one interaction, particularly for residents who may feel isolated, bored, or disoriented. Regular wellbeing conversations and personalised engagement could help improve emotional wellbeing and orientation.
- Explore options to provide dedicated transport for outings and community activities. Improved access to external trips, local events, and places of worship would support social inclusion and residents' independence.
- Continue to strengthen person-centred engagement by ensuring all residents feel comfortable raising concerns or expressing preferences about their care, food choices, and daily routines.
- Review staffing levels and deployment within the dementia and higher dependency areas to ensure staff have sufficient time to provide both practical care and meaningful social interaction.
- Maintain consistent standards of cleanliness and environmental upkeep throughout the home, including prompt attention to any concerns relating to odour control or room presentation.
- Provide additional support and communication training where required, including within housekeeping teams, to promote consistency, teamwork, and positive communication across all departments.
- Continue to build on the home's positive culture by encouraging inclusive relationships between staff and residents and promoting opportunities for residents to feel valued, involved, and connected to the wider home community.
- Expand opportunities for community involvement and personalised activities, including greater access to church attendance, outdoor activities, reminiscence work, and hobbies tailored to individual interests and life histories.

Provider response

Thank you for taking the time to provide this detailed feedback and set of recommendations. We appreciate the observations gathered from residents, relatives, and staff, and we welcome the opportunity to continue improving the environment and quality of care within the home.

We are encouraged that the report recognises the home's positive culture and commitment to inclusive relationships and person-centred care. Since the visit, we have already implemented several improvements across the service. The home is currently undergoing redecoration, and we have replaced staff communication boards to improve visibility, organisation, and access to important information for staff teams.

In relation to staffing levels, we utilise a dependency tool which enables us to formulate safe staffing ratios based on residents' needs and dependency levels. Staff members also float between areas where safe and appropriate to do so in order to support higher workloads, with management actively supporting the floor when required.

In regard to comments surrounding staffing concerns and staff feeling valued, we strive to maintain an open, supportive, and transparent culture throughout the home. As with any team environment, challenges can arise; however, our vision is to ensure that both staff and residents feel heard, respected, and supported. We actively encourage staff to approach management with any concerns, worries, or suggestions they may have.

To support this further, we hold monthly staff meetings and are currently looking to introduce an anonymous feedback box for both positive feedback and concerns so that we can work together as a team to address any issues constructively. In addition, we recognise staff achievements through a monthly Employee of the Month award for both day and night staff, with recipients receiving a gift as a token of appreciation for their hard work and dedication.

We have also implemented a new supervision document which includes discussions around wellbeing, concerns, support needs, and agreed actions to ensure staff are appropriately supported in their roles.

In relation to comments regarding residents experiencing boredom, isolation, or disorientation, we acknowledge that many residents within the home are living with dementia, and as such, each day can present differently and bring new challenges around engagement and orientation. Staff actively work to engage residents through positive reinforcement, reassurance, and personalised

approaches to encourage participation and meaningful interaction. This is an area we remain committed to improving upon, and we will continue to review and develop opportunities for engagement and emotional wellbeing support for all residents. These interventions, support strategies, and resident responses are reflected within individual care plans and daily documentation to ensure care remains person-centred and responsive to residents' changing needs.

With regards to housekeeping, a new domestic rota and schedule of duties has now been implemented. This provides greater clarity and structure to ensure cleaning tasks are completed promptly and consistently.

At the time of the visit, there was an odour present within the challenging behaviour unit relating to a gentleman who was experiencing a period of crisis. His care was managed in his best interests and with consideration for his safety and wellbeing, which at times required additional time due to mitigating factors that needed to be carefully considered. We are pleased to advise that this situation has now improved following support and intervention from the Mental Health Team.

We are also in ongoing discussions with the Director regarding improvements to the outdoor environment and how we can further enhance the area to better meet residents' needs.

To further strengthen meaningful engagement and one-to-one support, we have recruited a second Activities Coordinator who is currently awaiting completion of pre-employment checks. This role will particularly support residents within the challenging behaviour units through personalised one-to-one activities. In relation to comments regarding a bus being promised, we would respectfully clarify that this was not a commitment that had been made. However, we are currently exploring opportunities similar to those used within one of our sister homes, where fundraising through the Comfort Fund has successfully supported day trips and outings for residents.

We remain committed to ensuring residents feel safe, valued, heard, and supported in all aspects of daily life. We will continue to use feedback constructively to strengthen our services and further enhance residents' wellbeing and quality of life.

Thank you again for your feedback and continued support.

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Dr Ashdown Stockton Lodge Nursing Home

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