



healthwatch
in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

**"Something Someone Told Me"
Care Home Lay Visiting Project**

Higher Park Lodge

Lay Representative Report

July 2025



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About us

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay (HWDPT) are the three local independent consumer champions for people using health and social care services across Devon.

Local Healthwatch organisations were established as independent bodies run by local people, for local people. They are part of a national network of local Healthwatch in England that was set up under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Healthwatch engages with the local community effectively and gives residents of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided for them.

Background

In July 2024, Healthwatch Plymouth held discussions with the Social Care Quality Assurance & Improvement Team (QAiT) at Plymouth City Council to discuss ways of increasing feedback from residents in care homes by re-establishing a programme of care home lay visiting that was curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

The “Something Someone Told Me” project is a joint initiative delivered by Plymouth City Council and Healthwatch Plymouth. Its purpose is to gather thoughts, views and ideas from residents, relatives and providers of local care homes and is based around the ‘My Home Life Programme’. It allows Healthwatch Plymouth to have conversations with residents and their relatives in local care homes, covering aspects of the ‘My Home Life Programme’. Healthwatch Plymouth also sought feedback from care home providers and managers to give them a say on the challenges they face in delivering the programme.

Feedback is gathered around five key themes:

- Maintaining identity
- Creating community
- Shared decision making

- Improving health and healthcare
- Promoting a positive culture.

To help in gathering feedback and to provide a consistent process, Healthwatch Plymouth devised a series of points to aid in the discussions with residents, relatives and providers. A list of these points is available in the Annex.

Healthwatch Plymouth volunteer lay representatives undertake the care home visits. They speak to residents and staff, collate the feedback gathered and present it in this report themselves. Any observations made by them, or the findings and quotes included within this report, are not necessarily the view of Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

About Higher Park Lodge

Higher Park Lodge is a care home situated within Devonport Park in Plymouth. The home provides care for people aged over 65, many of whom are living with different stages of dementia.

The home offers 28 single bedrooms and three rooms designed for couples or companions. Some of the bedrooms include en-suite wet room facilities.

Higher Park Lodge overlooks Devonport Park in Devonport, Plymouth and is surrounded by attractive greenery, with flowers and trees providing pleasant views. However, the exterior of the building appeared quite dated and in need of refurbishment and general maintenance. The home does not currently have an outdoor space for residents.

During our visit, the home appeared clean, tidy, and well maintained internally. We received a very warm welcome from the registered manager and staff, who were friendly and happy to answer any questions we had. As many residents are living with dementia, opportunities for interaction were limited, although we were able to briefly engage with a small number of residents. The bedrooms are compact but appear homely.

Executive Summary

On the 17th July 2025, Higher Park Lodge Care Home was visited by two lay representatives from the Healthwatch Plymouth Volunteer Team. This report summarises insights from resident conversations with our lay representatives, focusing on five key themes:

- Maintaining identity
- Creating community
- Shared decision making
- Improving health and healthcare
- Promoting a positive culture.

Summarised Key Findings

- From the exterior, the home needs maintenance, but in contrast, the interior of the home is warm and welcoming.
- Activities with the home are somewhat limited, but the Activity Coordinator is committed to improving this for the residents.
- Residents and visitors that we spoke with stated they were happy with the care they were receiving.
- Observations on our visit supported that the home motto “We work where you live; you do not live where we work” is embraced by staff.

Summarised Key Recommendations

There are no specific recommendations for Higher Park Lodge. Our observation is that it appears to be a well-managed care home with a warm and friendly environment.

Conversational Findings and Survey Responses

The following is a summary of the conversations held with residents and relatives during the visit, around the five key themes outlined previously.

Maintaining Identity

Findings from our visit

During our visit to Higher Park Lodge, it was apparent that staff members know the residents well and understand their individual communication needs. Staff and residents address each other by their first names, which helps create a friendly and familiar atmosphere.

Residents' bedrooms are decorated according to their personal tastes and preferences. Although the rooms are compact, efforts have been made to ensure they feel comfortable and homely for the residents.

The communal areas, including the lounge, dining room, and hallways, are somewhat limited in space. However, they have been thoughtfully decorated with photographs, paintings, and posters.

While some residents had expressed concerns about the food, they are involved in decisions about the weekly menu and are able to choose alternative meals if they do not wish to have the meal offered on a particular day. During our visit, we were informed that sandwiches are available to residents if requested; however, we did not observe any evidence of this during our time at the home.

We did not see evidence that religious preferences are not catered for. However, during a conversation with the Activity Coordinator, she explained that she is open to suggestions and is willing to consider new ideas that could help improve the services provided.

Provider's Response to Maintaining Identity

"We pride ourselves on meeting a variety of needs that our residents may have relating to the above."

We provide all documents in an EasyRead format, able to access braille if needed."

Creating Community

Findings from Our Visit

Higher Park Lodge had a notable sense of belonging during our visit, which was evident from noted behaviours and symbols such as the signage displayed in the entrance and throughout the home, which states "We work where you live; you do not live where we work".

The home employs an Activities Coordinator who advises that residents are encouraged to take part in the activities, such as knitting, sewing, baking and animal visits, although it was noted these activities were limited, but the Activity Coordinator is open to new ideas.

Outings at the home are minimal, but the Activity Coordinator tries to take residents on an individual basis to the surrounding Devonport Park for a walk or a coffee.

During our interactions with the residents, they spoke highly of all staff members. One resident, who was 102 years old, noted the "superb" levels of cleaning, and everything was "spotless."

When speaking with visitors who were attending the home on the day we visited, they said they are very happy with the level of care their relatives receive, offering praise for all staff members.

Provider's Response to Creating Community

"We ensure that all residents are treated as equals and individuals. Staff will spend time getting to know them, their likes and dislikes and our activities coordinator completes regular residents meetings to obtain their thoughts and wishes.

We gather feedback from our residents to see what changes they wish to see, what is working for them and what is not."

Sharing Decision Making

Findings from Our Visit

There are residents' meetings on either a weekly or bi-weekly basis to gather feedback and understand residents' views. These meetings allow residents to share their ideas and be involved in decisions about the home. However, it was noted that this can sometimes be challenging due to the high number of residents living with dementia.

Family members and friends are actively encouraged to visit whenever they wish. The home has an open visiting policy, allowing visits 24 hours a day with no restrictions.

Provider's Response to Sharing Decision Making

"Information regarding this is gathered in the first couple of days from admission and all residents are encouraged and reminded that there is not a set bedtime or time to get up. Residents are reminded of our motto regularly "We work in their home, they do not live in our work"

We have end of life boxes that include Amazon Echos for music, mouth care, skin care and various other items."

Improving Health and Healthcare

Findings from Our Visit

Residents have access to a GP service via online registration that can be accessed daily. There is also a weekly ward round. There is also access to District Nursing St Luke's OPMH, social work and a podiatrist.

When attending Higher Park Lodge Care Home, we witnessed a nurse dispensing medication with great assurance that she was checking the medical notes before any medication was dispensed to a resident.

During our visit, we witnessed specialist care being provided one-to-one to a resident who had fallen on several occasions. Although we were advised that the resident was being assessed for a nursing home placement, as the home was not able to provide one-to-one care.

We did note that the home does not currently offer access to a physiotherapist, although the Activities Coordinator advised that she

attempts to ensure movement in residents through dancing and musical activities.

A hairdresser and chiropodist are available to residents by appointment.

Provider's Response to Improving Health and Healthcare

"Online registration and access is available daily, we also complete a weekly ward round.

We have a good relationship with our surgery."

Promoting a Positive Culture

Findings from Our Visit

Higher Park Lodge Care Home appeared busy at times, but this did not seem to affect the residents, who all appeared calm, comfortable, and well supported. Staff were seen providing individual care and attention, ensuring residents' needs were met.

We also noticed that staff members worked well together. They supported one another when needed and interacted in a respectful and pleasant way.

During our visit, residents appeared to be receiving a good standard of care. They looked clean, comfortable, and well cared for. The home itself appeared clean and stimulating for residents.

While the activities currently appear somewhat limited, the home's dedicated Activity Coordinator shared that they are keen to expand and improve the activities on offer.

Provider's Response to Promoting a Positive Culture

In response to the question, are residents encouraged to take part in the activities with others?

"Yes, they are. We also have individual activities for those who do not wish to take part and/or are bed bound."

Healthwatch Volunteer Visiting Team Observations

When we visited Higher Park Lodge Care Home, we were welcomed by a cheerful and friendly team of staff, which helped create a warm and positive atmosphere throughout the home.

From the outside, the building appeared somewhat run-down and in need of maintenance. In contrast, the interior environment felt more welcoming. The walls were decorated with photos, pictures and posters, which provided visual interest and stimulation for residents, although space within the home appeared limited.

During our visit, the home felt calm, relaxed and clean. Staff were observed supporting one another and working together to care for residents. We were welcomed by the registered manager and members of staff, who were very accommodating during our visit. While staff accompanied us where necessary, we were also given the freedom to walk around the home and speak with residents.

We spoke with a resident and a visitor, both of whom shared that they were happy and pleased with the care being provided. Opportunities for conversation were somewhat limited, as many residents appeared to be living with varying stages of dementia, which made longer discussions more difficult.

Recommendations

There are no specific recommendations for Higher Park Lodge. Our observation is that it appears to be a well-managed care home with a warm and friendly environment.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Plymouth would like to thank staff and residents from Higher Park Lodge Care Home for their time to answer our questions.

Special thanks go to our lay representative volunteers, whose dedication and support continue to make this project possible.

Annex A – Residents/Relatives points for conversation

Maintaining identity

- Do you feel that you are treated as an individual by management and staff?
- If you have communication needs i.e. language, sign language, hearing loop, braille or large print documents, do you feel that the provider meets those needs?
- Do you have access to a fast Wi-Fi connection, computer access, email and internet, as well as phones/devices to video call with family?
- Do you feel that the provider is open to meeting any spiritual, cultural social and sexual needs that you may have in a sensitive manner?

Creating Community

- Does the management and staff promote a sense of community within the home, and do you feel that you have a sense of belonging, purpose and security?
- Do you have a sense of fulfilment from being a resident in that you are treated as an individual, but also a member of the home's community?

Sharing Decision Making

- Are there regular meetings between residents and management that look at how the home is run? If so, are your views residents and those of your relatives gained and considered to improve practice?
- Do you feel that you are empowered to make decisions about your care and daily living i.e. flexibility when you go to bed or get up, are you able to control the amount of lighting or temperature of your room?

Improving health and healthcare

- Are you registered with and have access to a GP, and do you receive annual health/medication reviews?
- Do you have access, if required, to support from specialist services i.e.: Parkinson's nurse specialist, heart specialist, dentist, optician, etc?
- Do you believe that your health needs are met, and you are taken seriously if you become unwell?
- Are your relatives/carers informed when you become unwell or any changes are made to your treatment?
- If needed, are you provided with specialist equipment i.e., walking aids, specialist chairs, pressure relieving mattress/aids?
- Is assistance readily available to help you with activities of daily living – getting in and out of bed, to the dining room, eating, etc?
- If you have a disability and need easy access shower/bath facilities, are they available for you to use with assistance if required?
- Are you encouraged to have regular showers or baths?

Promoting a Positive Culture

- Do you feel that the staff supports you to play an active role in the running of the home?
- Is an activities programme provided by the Home? If so, are you encouraged to take part in any activities with others?
- Does the Home encourage people from outside to visit i.e. someone playing music, simple exercise, Arts and Crafts?
- Equally are trips out organised for residents i.e. to local community venues?
- Are you able to access all resident's areas of the home, especially if you have a disability?
- Can you choose your meal from a menu and if you need a special diet, is this catered for?
- Can your family and friends bring in food?

Annex B – Provider Survey Questions

Personal details

- Care Home Name:
- Your Name:
- Job Title:
- Number of Residents:
- Patients: tick all that apply
 - Nursing
 - Residential
 - Dementia
 - Learning Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Mental Health
 - Older People
 -

Maintaining identity

- As a provider are you open to meeting any spiritual, cultural social and sexual needs that residents may have in a sensitive manner? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', What are you able to facilitate?
- If a resident has communication needs i.e. language, sign language, hearing loop, braille or large print documents, are you able to meets those needs? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', What processes or systems do you have in place?
- Do your residents have access to a fast Wi-Fi connection, computer access, email and internet, as well as phones/devices to video call with family? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', What items do they have access to and how often are they used?

- Have you had recent experience (within the last 12 months) of making a safeguarding alert to the Plymouth Safe Guarding Adults Board? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', Is information on how to make a report clear?
 - If 'yes', Did you find the process to make the report easy?

Creating Community

- Do you feel that management and staff promote a sense of community within your home so that residents feel that they have a sense of belonging, purpose and security? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', What measures and activities do you have in place?
- How do you measure the sense of fulfilment a resident has, not only by being treated as an individual, but also as a member of the home's community?

Sharing Decision Making

- Are residents and relatives encouraged to have an active role in the running of the home? [Yes/No]
 - If yes, Are there regular meetings between residents and management (group and 1:1) that look at how the home is run? [Yes/No]
 - If yes, How often are these meetings held?
- Are the views of residents and their relatives considered to improve practice?
- Are residents empowered to make decisions about their care and daily living, for example, flexibility when they go to bed and get up, able to control the amount of lighting or temperature of their room? [Yes/No]
 - If 'Yes' what processes are in place to encourage this? [Free text]

- What processes are in place when an individual is approaching end of life?
- Do you initiate conversations to help someone plan their end of life care?
- Do you develop support systems for individuals, staff, friends and relatives as part of compassionate communities?
- Are End of Life patients, if appropriate, able to self-medicate?
- If a resident has a TEP (Treatment Escalation Plan) where are these kept?
- If applicable, do you recognise the challenge, and develop systems, for end of life care in dementia/those with learning disabilities?

Improving health and healthcare

- How are residents registered with a GP and what routine access to a GP do they have?
- Do they receive annual health and medication reviews from their GP [Yes/No]
- How is your relationship with GP practice(s) that support the home?
- If you request a GP visit, is this responded to in a timely manner? [Yes/No]
 - If no, when does the visit occur?
- Do residents have access to dental services and opticians? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', Will these services attend the home if the resident's mobility is severely restricted? [Yes/No]
- Is the home affiliated to any dental practice and optician service? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', what are the names of these practices
- Can staff and patients access support from specialist services, for example, Heart Failure, Parkinson's nurse specialist, tissue viability nurse specialist? [Yes/No]
 - If 'yes', what specialist services are you currently accessing?
- What processes are in place to meet residents ongoing health needs i.e. podiatry, dementia, mental health?

- Are residents' relatives/carers informed when they become unwell, or any changes are made to their treatment? [Yes/No]
- If needed, are residents able to access or are provided with specialist equipment, for example, walking aids, specialist chairs, pressure relieving mattress/aids? [Yes/No]
- Are residents encouraged to have regular showers or baths? [Yes/No/N/A]
- If residents have a disability and need easy access shower/bath facilities, are they available for use with assistance (if required) when requested by the resident? [Yes/No/N/A]

Promoting a Positive Culture

- Do you provide an activities programme for residents? [Yes/No]
 - If 'Yes', are residents encouraged to take part in the activities with others? [Yes/No]
- Does your care home encourage people from outside to visit i.e. someone playing music, simple exercise, Arts and Crafts? [Yes/No]
 - If 'No', what are the reasons for this?
- Are trips out organised for residents i.e. to local community venues? [Yes/No]
 - If 'No', what are the reasons for this?
- Are residents able to access all common areas of the home, especially if they have a disability? [Yes/No]
 - If 'No' What are the barriers to this?
- Can residents choose a meal from a menu? [Yes/No]
- If they need a special diet, is this catered for? [Yes/No]
 - If 'No', what are the barriers to this?
- Can family and friends bring in food? [Yes/No]
 - If 'Yes' is there a facility available for items to be stored in a fridge/cupboard? [Yes/No]

Additional Comments

- Is there anything you are currently doing in your care home that you are really proud of, has made a significant difference for residents, or that you feel is best practice in the industry? And is something you would be happy to share with other homes?
- Finally, do you have any additional comments you would like to share or any other general feedback?

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