

The Learning Centre, Melville Road, Harold Hill RM3 8SB

Follow-Up Visit

This was a follow-up to the full visit undertaken approximately a year ago.

At that visit, the Healthwatch volunteers were very impressed with what they observed. The premises were well presented; there were no unpleasant smells; there was ample space for the activities being undertaken; and those activities were wide-ranging and in keeping with the needs of the client group.

The team that had carried out that visit had made only one recommendation, which was to replace the carpets on the ground floor with solid flooring having a non-slip finish. This recommendation was made in the light of the fact that cooking and other activities could create spillages that were more easily cleaned from a hard surface.

The team that carried out this follow-up visit were delighted to see that this recommendation had been accepted that that all ground floor areas had non-slip floor finishes. The team were informed that the floor was cleaned professionally twice a week to ensure it remained in good condition.

The manager showed the team around and they were able to observe a variety of activities being undertaken: cooking; coffee cake and Welsh soda bread baking; wi-fi-based 10-pin bowling (there was also a real bowling facility); computer activities; and some service users were collecting together their models, painting etc. from the previous year in order to create space for the next 'academic' year. Examples of users' work were displayed on corridor walls. In the activities room, Aldo table soccer and other table games were available. There is a library with a screen and projector.

The atmosphere was calm and all service users appeared to happy.

The facility had increased its mini-bus stock to 3 which, as result, required a PSV operator's licence and a transportation manager had been appointed.

The Centre had an allotment, which had been extended and was visited as much as possible, weather permitting. The Centre has plans to provide a log cabin and sensory garden there.

All staff are subject to advanced DBS checks which are updated every 3 years. Increasing numbers of staff have undertaken first-aid training.

Many service users were entered for ASDAN certificates, according to their abilities. An independent Living Group had been set up.

All training provided at the Centre was aimed at underpinning life skills for the service users. It was supported by an active group of “Friends”, who raised funds by means such as raffles and quiz nights.

The team was given an update on litigation between the Centre and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, who had ruled that the Centre could not be exempted from VAT, despite the fact that the service being provided was like that provided by local authorities, who are exempt from VAT. The rationale behind this appeared to be solely that payment for services was made by relatives/guardians of service users from Personal Independence Payments rather than directly from Adult Social Care (who actually made the payments to relatives!); this was in line with government guidelines that service users should be able to manage their own benefits. The team were pleased to hear that a ruling had been made in favour of the Centre - but very disappointed to hear that HMRC had waited until the last minute to lodge an appeal against the decision. The Centre was now waiting to hear the outcome of the appeal.

The Centre dived of continuing concern that the issue of regulation had not yet been resolved. The CQC appeared interested only in units that had residential facilities whereas the local authority regarded the Centre as being ‘educational’ despite the client groups ranging from 19 years to 60.

The team were very impressed with this service which they would describe as excellent - very much “how it should be done”.