

# **Lay Assessor (Elected Council Members) Visits to Care Homes in Neath Port Talbot County Borough**

## **A Guide for Elected Members & Care Home Managers**

**Version 2.0  
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## 1. BACKGROUND

**For the purpose of brevity within this document the term 'Lay Assessors' applies to Elected Members of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) who have undertaken the appropriate training and are participants in the Lay Assessor visit programme.**

- 1.1. Independent sector residential and nursing care homes are key to providing support to older people who have care and support needs.
- 1.2. An increasing number of Local Authorities in England and Wales have successfully introduced a programme where Lay Assessors carrying out visits to independent sector care homes.
- 1.3. Research has shown that Lay Assessors have a significant role to play in ensuring citizens are able to express their views and concerns on the quality of care that they are receiving at their home, on a one-to-one basis.

## 2. PURPOSE

- 2.1. The main purpose of Lay Assessor visits is to help ensure that elderly or vulnerable adults who are living in care homes receive appropriate care and a quality service which is holistic, appropriate and safe to meet their needs.
- 2.2. Care is provided to the most vulnerable people in our community and it is essential that people with support needs are afforded suitable safeguards.
- 2.3. Lay Assessor visits complement the work done by Local Authority and NHS Monitoring Officers. They bring fresh ideas into the monitoring regime; assisting in applying standards effectively and evenly across all sectors.
- 2.4. The programme of Lay Assessor visits contributes to safeguarding by providing a mechanism where quality of care is reviewed.
- 2.5. As a Lay Assessor, Elected Members play a key role in providing a view of services which is independent of the management of those services.
- 2.6. Further advantages with Elected Members undertaking the role as Lay Assessors are:
  - It will assist Elected Members in decision making by providing a better understanding of the independent care home sector.
  - It ensures that the rights of people receiving care are respected and their needs met.
  - They do not work for agencies that are tasked to inspect/monitor.
  - They do not have any financial interest in the services.
  - They will help to spot where improvements can be made.
  - They can assist in ensuring that citizens are safe.

### **3. REMIT OF LAY ASSESSORS**

- 3.1. The visits are conducted on a voluntary basis by Lay Assessors that are Elected Members of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council.
- 3.2. Visits are carried out in accordance with the programme, focusing on the quality of care that care home residents receive. Each care home will receive one Lay Assessor visit per annum.
- 3.3. The visits are non political and are not confined to Elected Members' own wards.
- 3.4. Lay Assessors will receive an induction and training programme which will include classroom based training on 'dignity in care' and 'dementia care' and they will be accompanied during their first visit by an Officer from the NPTCBC Commissioning Unit for advice and support. All Lay assessors will be required to have an enhanced Discloser and Barring Service check prior to commencing visits.
- 3.5. As Lay Assessors, Elected Members will be able to obtain the views of people who use the services including families and staff. Guidance on good practice questions and the format of a typical Lay Assessor visit are provided within Appendices A and B.
- 3.6. Following each visit, Lay Assessors will provide verbal feedback to the Manager/ Senior Staff present at the care home and a completed Feedback Report will be sent to the Manager. This feedback will be taken into account during the annual monitoring regime.
- 3.7. All Lay Assessors will be required to give a written undertaking to safeguard the confidentiality of all information they receive in the course of their role.
- 3.8. Any concerns or problems raised during their visit will be referred to the NPTCBC Safeguarding Team or Commissioning Unit.
- 3.9. Any Lay Assessor who identifies a potential conflict of interest in any of the visits scheduled should contact the Commissioning Unit for advice.

### **4. PREPARATION FOR LAY ASSESSOR VISIT – ELECTED MEMBERS**

- 4.1. Lay Assessors are scheduled to take place for each care home within a particular month. Lay Assessors are requested to follow the rota and not visit establishments that are not scheduled for them during that particular month.
- 4.2. Visits are made by Lay Assessors in pairs.
- 4.3. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, a Lay Assessor's partner is unavailable, another Lay Assessor can be asked to replace the partner on the planned visit.

- 4.4. If the decision is made to complete the visit alone, the Lay Assessor **MUST** ask the care home Manager/member of staff to accompany them when meeting residents.
- 4.5. If a Lay Assessor cancels a visit, they must inform the Commissioning Unit who will make arrangements to reschedule the visit.
- 4.6. It may be beneficial if Lay Assessors telephone the establishment approximately 15 minutes before arrival. This decision is left to individual Lay Assessors' discretion.
- 4.7. Each Lay Assessor will receive:
  - Lay Assessor Visit Rota (containing names of Elected Members, establishments, month of visit)
  - Details of the establishments (addresses, telephone numbers, brief descriptions of the care home)
  - Visit Feedback Report (Appendix D - please photocopy as necessary)
- 4.8. Lay Assessors should always be aware that the visits should focus on the care and support provided to residents.
- 4.9. It is also important for Lay Assessors to have the opportunity to meet residents and families therefore, timing of visits is key.
- 4.10. Security should always be a priority and Lay Assessors should show their identity cards on arrival at the establishment.
- 4.11. The dress code for Lay Assessors is smart/casual.

## **5. PREPARATION FOR LAY ASSESSOR VISIT – CARE HOME MANAGERS**

- 5.1 Care homes will receive one Lay Assessor Visit per annum. Each care home will be notified in advance of the particular month in which the Lay Assessor Visit is scheduled to take place. (The exact date of the visit will not be provided).
- 5.2 If, due to unforeseen circumstances, a Lay Assessor's visit is cancelled or postponed to another month, the Commissioning Unit will inform the Care Home Manager as soon as possible.
- 5.3 Care Home Managers are responsible for ensuring that all staff are informed about Lay Assessor visits and are able to respond appropriately to such visits. A quick reference guide for staff will be made available to help staff understand what the Lay Assessor visit will entail.

## **6. THE LAY ASSESSOR VISIT**

- 6.1. It is important that Lay Assessors recognise that on visiting a Care Home they are visiting a person's 'own home'. Care home residents can be vulnerable and often emotionally upset, resulting in an atmosphere which can sometimes be strained.

- 6.2. On arrival, Lay Assessors should ask for the Manager or senior member of staff on duty, show their identity card and sign the visitor's book.
- 6.3. Lay Assessors should also be aware that because their visits are not by appointment (although Lay Assessors may wish to notify the establishment in advance of their visit), it might mean that their arrival comes at a time when a serious issue is being dealt with. If this should happen, staff may need to ask the Lay Assessor to wait and will ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for them.
- 6.4. During the visit, Lay Assessors will focus on the quality of care delivered by obtaining feedback from residents regarding their experiences of living at the care home.
- 6.5. Confidentiality is paramount and Lay Assessors will need to respect the fact that staff cannot breach confidentiality in relation to individual residents.
- 6.6. Ideally, the Lay Assessor should talk to residents during their visit independently of staff. However, staff will use their discretion to advise the Lay Assessor to ensure the care and safety of the residents. The principle of enabling residents to freely express their views should be maintained where ever possible.
- 6.7. Questions should be asked which enable the Lay Assessors to ascertain the residents' views about the care they receive. (Appendix B refers to possible conversation topics to be considered / observations to be made). Such questions could include asking about arrangements for visitors or about the menu choices available.
- 6.8. Lay Assessors should also talk to staff and ask them about the organisation and management of the establishment.
- 6.9. A tour of the building is beneficial to assess the state of repair and the physical environment which plays a part in the delivery of quality care.
- 6.10. Finally, Lay Assessors will need to complete a brief feedback report, providing details of the visit, any comments and quotes from residents where possible and any recommendations. The report must be sent, either by email, or internal mail, to:

Neil Evans,  
Senior Scrutiny & Member Development Officer,  
Social Care Health and Housing,  
Port Talbot Civic Centre,  
Port Talbot  
SA13 1PJ  
Tel: 01639 763747  
Email: g.n.evans@npt.gov.uk

- 6.11. During the visit, Members will need to use the Visit Feedback Report as a guide of areas to cover during their visit.

## **7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **7.1. The Corporate Director, Social Care Health and Housing**

The Corporate Director, Social Care Health and Housing, has overall responsibility for the rota visiting process.

All Lay Assessor feedback reports submitted will be recorded and responded to where any issues raised are a serious cause for concern or when a Lay Assessor particularly request a response.

Lay Assessor feedback reports will be provided to the NPTCBC's Commissioning Unit Manager who will use the findings to help gather resident's views which can feed into the on-going contract monitoring arrangements for the independent sector care homes.

### **7.2. Care Home Managers**

- All Care Home managers will be given information in relation to the purpose of Lay Assessor visits. Managers welcome these visits and value the comments and interest of Lay Assessors and they also acknowledge the importance of these visits to residents.
- Managers are responsible for ensuring that all staff are informed about Lay Assessor visits and are able to respond appropriately to such visits.
- They will therefore ensure that on arrival either they, or the senior member of staff on duty, will check Lay Assessors identity cards and ensure that the visitor's book is signed.
- They will provide Lay Assessors with information about the establishment and the service provided e.g. how many residents there are and what needs the establishment caters for.
- They will then make arrangements for a tour around the building and introduce Lay Assessors to residents.
- The Manager or senior member of staff will advise Lay Assessors on the appropriateness of speaking with residents and the best methods of engagement.
- On the very unusual occasion when the Lay Assessor visit occurs at a time when staff are not able to immediately assist with the visit because of a particular difficulty, staff will explain this and make arrangements for Lay Assessors to wait.

### 7.3. Elected Members/ Lay Assessors

- Lay Assessors are responsible for co-ordinating their visit in accordance with the rota schedule, i.e. arrange with their partner to visit the identified establishments in the identified month.
- Lay Assessors are to carry their identity card and report to the Manager at the establishment.
- The visit will include discussions with staff and residents. Lay Assessors must pay particular regard to the rights of the residents in respect of privacy and dignity (e.g. do not visit users' rooms without permission).
- Lay Assessors are to be alert to any adult protection issues and report these matters to the Corporate Director, SSHH as a matter of urgency.
- Rota visiting reports are to be completed as soon as possible after the visit and returned to the Neil Evans (details provided earlier in the guidance).

## **8. MONITORING**

- 8.1. The feedback obtained from Lay Assessor visits will help NPTCBC to gather the views from care home residents about the services they receive.
- 8.2. The feedback from the visits will be provided to the Commissioning Unit Manager to help inform annual contract monitoring reports for independent sector care homes.
- 8.3. Where there are specific issues or concerns identified during the visits the Commissioning Unit Manager will liaise with the care home directly to ensure that they are resolved adequately.

## **9. FORMS AND REPORTING**

- 9.1. The feedback report is an important aspect of the Lay Assessor visit. It provides essential information to the Director and Managers, and should be as straightforward as possible.
- 9.2. A feedback report (Appendix D), is to be completed as soon as possible following the visit.
- 9.3. The report must state the name of the establishment, the date of the visit, the names of the visiting Members and the name of the Manager/ senior member of staff who assisted the visit.
- 9.4. Elected Members need to state whether or not they were able to talk to residents and what their views were, including quotes where possible and about how the establishment is organised and managed.



- 9.5. The report should be signed (hard copy or electronically) and dated by the visiting Members and sent to Neil Evans (details in section 6 of this report).
- 9.6. On receipt of the report, any concerns and issues raised will be noted and appropriate staff, managers and service areas will receive a copy of the report. Any actions or response required will be followed through.
- 9.8. A copy of the report is retained on the Lay Assessor Programme file.
- 9.9. **If Lay Assessors have an immediate concern that a person is at risk/not safe then they need to report this to the NPTCBC Safeguarding Team immediately.**

## **10. SUMMARY**

- 10.1. Lay Assessor visits will play an important aspect of monitoring services. It is valued by Managers, who appreciate the involvement and interest of Elected Members in their work, and by care home residents. It is also an important reflection of NPTCBC's commitment to its citizens and the partnership approach required to make that commitment a reality.
- 10.2. Lay Assessors who take part in the programme will be making an important contribution to the monitoring and development of the service and will also find that rota visiting is an informative and valuable experience.
- 10.3. Should Lay Assessors or Care Home Managers have any queries, please contact:

Neil Evans  
Senior Scrutiny & Member Development Officer  
Port Talbot Civic Centre  
Port Talbot  
SA13 1PJ  
Tel: 01639 763747  
Email: g.n.evans@npt.gov.uk

## **11. APPENDICIES**

**Appendix A:** *Lists some observations / discussion topics for consideration and describes the format of a typical visit.*

**Appendix B:** *Good practice questions*

**Appendix C:** *Frequently asked questions to assist Lay Assessors*

**Appendix D:** *Visit Feedback Report Template*

## Appendix A

### ***Observation/ discussion topics for consideration when undertaking a Lay Assessor visit***

**You do not need to cover all these issues on every occasion. They are a guide to the range of subjects that concern residents from time to time. Residents must not feel that they are being interrogated but that you are there to help ensure that they have good care.**

- Involvement in decision making – food choices, bed times, bathing/washing hair etc
- Access to their own personal items
- Access for visitors / contact with family and friends – is this encouraged?
- Privacy and Dignity
- Facilities for reading/learning/studying
- General atmosphere/environment - appropriate to residents
- Resident feedback on their experiences of living at the home
- Resident feedback if they feel safe at the home

### ***Example of a Lay Assessor Visit***

- Telephone call to the Care Home Manager to inform them of the visit (at the discretion of the visiting Lay Assessors)
- On arrival, introductions and sign visitors book
- During the visit (in no particular order):
  - An accompanied tour of communal areas within the home by the Manager/ staff (can include a sample of resident bedrooms with permission from the occupants/ Manager)
  - Introductions with residents
  - Conversations with residents on their experiences of living at the care home
  - Conversations with staff on their experiences of working at the care home
  - Conversations with visitors on their experiences of visiting the care home
  - Conversations with the Manager to explore how the home operates
- Verbal feedback of visit with Manager/ Senior Staff

## Appendix B

### **Good Practice questions**

#### Involvement in decision making

- What did you have for breakfast/dinner today? Do you like it?
- Is there a good choice of meals here?
- I like your cardigan. Did you pick it out? (i.e. do they have choice of what to wear?)

#### Visits from family and friends

- Check with manager if appropriate to ask as the person may not have any family
- Can ask visiting families/ visitors:
  - Are they able to visit at any time?
  - Are you made to feel welcome when visiting?
  - How do you find the staff and the Manager – are they supportive?

#### Leisure time

- Do you have any hobbies? Do you continue your hobbies here? (i.e. do you knit/ do jigsaws here? etc.)
- What do you like to watch on the TV?
- Have you anything planned for the weekend?

#### Trips out

- Do you like going out?
- Where's your favourite place to go?
- Have you been anywhere nice lately?

#### Get a feel for:

- The atmosphere – is there a “buzz”
- General cleanliness (look and smell)
- Do people look happy?
- Observe if residents are interacting/playing/involved in something
- Observe security
- Privacy – do residents feel their rooms are “theirs”
- Do residents have personal possessions on show?
- Do residents look particularly drowsy

#### Remember:

- All people like to be listened to
- Enquire with staff if disabled residents use any specialist form of communication aids which may assist them to interact during the visit
- Some people have off days – speak to the staff if you are concerned
- Ask the staff to interpret the behaviour you see if you are concerned
- In a lot of cases, the premises you visit is the resident's home.

## Appendix C

### ***Frequently asked questions for Elected Members:***

**Q.** Why should I volunteer to participate on the Council's rota visiting programme to Social Services establishments?

**A.** Because as an elected Member, you have responsibility for the care and support we provide vulnerable people in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council. You are the voice of the people that we serve.

**Q.** What support will I get?

**A.** Comprehensive guidance is provided and training is offered. Officers are also available to discuss any queries or concerns you may have during the process.

**Q.** What kind of things should I be reporting on?

**A.** The quality of care provided to care home residents is the main thing that needs to be reported on. A safe and positive environment is also very important to the wellbeing of care home residents.

**Q.** How often do I have to visit the establishments?

**A.** This is dependent on the number of Councillor's that volunteer to participate in the rota visiting programme. The more Members that volunteer, the less visits there will be per month.

**Q.** How do I know when the best time to visit is?

**A.** We would advise that you ring the establishment (although this is at your discretion) before you plan to visit to ensure that staff are available to show you around. We would also advise you to look at the attached guidance which will show a contact name and number for establishments.

**Q.** What happens with my report?

**A.** Copies are distributed to the Commissioning Unit, NPTCBC Social Services Head of Service and Care Home Managers. A copy is retained on the master Lay Assessor Programme file.

**Q.** Will I get feedback?

**A.** Elected Members will get a response to any serious concerns they have raised. For example on the level of care provided to a service user, or Health and Safety issues. If Care Home Managers provide feedback on their experience of the visit that they wish to pass onto the Lay Assessors who conducted the visit, this feedback will be passed on to the relevant Elected Members.

**Q.** What happens if my partner can't make the visit (through illness etc)?

**A.** Good practice indicates that Members should not go alone. This is for the benefit of both residents and the Members themselves. However, Members should contact Neil Evans in the first instance to see if an alternative Elected Member is available to conduct the visit. On occasions, if a Member feels confident, it is acceptable to visit alone. The Commissioning Unit can provide further advice on this.

## Appendix D

## Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Lay Assessor Care Home Visit Feedback Report

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Care Home Name:</b>  |  |
| <b>Visit Date:</b>  |  |
| <b>Lay Assessors who Conducted Visit:</b>                               |  |
| <b>Care Home Staff who Assisted with Visit (Manager/ Senior Staff):</b> |  |
| <b>Date Report Completed:</b>   |  |

| <b>Summary Feedback (✓ / ✗)</b>  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>If you answer no to any question, please provide more detailed feedback overleaf</i>  |  |
| <b>Welcome and Arrival</b>   |  |
| Did you receive a warm welcome at the care home?   |  |
| Were you asked to sign into the visitor's book?  |  |
| <b>Safe and Positive Environment</b>   |  |
| Was the home in a good state of repair?  |  |
| Do residents feel the care home is appropriately decorated i.e. homely?  |  |
| Do residents feel the care home has a positive atmosphere?   |  |
| Were staff present and on hand to assist residents?  |  |
| Were staff engaging with residents during your visit?  |  |
| Did staff appear positive, friendly and relaxed?   |  |
| <b>Resident Feedback</b>   |  |
| Do residents feel they can exercise choice over their daily living e.g. when to get up/ go to bed/ menu choices/ activity choices? |  |
| Do residents feel safe at the home?  |  |
| Do residents feel staff treat them with respect?   |  |
| Do residents feel the activities provided at the home which meet their interests?  |  |
| Do residents feel there are trips/ days out to locations which meet their interests?   |  |

| <b>Staff Feedback</b>  |  |
|--|--|
| Do staff feel supported by the Care Home Manager/ Senior Staff?                  |  |
| Do staff feel the training they receive fully enables them to fulfil their role? |  |
| Do staff feel there is a positive morale at the care home?                       |  |

| <b>Comments/ Quotes from Care Home Residents:</b> |
|---|
|   |

| <b>Comments/ Quotes from Care Home Staff:</b> |
|---|
|   |



**Lay Assessor Feedback and Recommendations:**

Large empty rectangular box for providing feedback and recommendations.

|                          |  |                  |  |             |  |
|--------------------------|--|------------------|--|-------------|--|
| <b>Lay Assessor Name</b> |  | <b>Signature</b> |  | <b>Date</b> |  |
| <b>Lay Assessor Name</b> |  | <b>Signature</b> |  | <b>Date</b> |  |

| <b>OFFICE USE ONLY – FOR COMPLETION IN THE SSHH DIRECTORATE</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Date Report Received:</i>                                    |  |
| <i>Date Report forwarded to Service Manager:</i>                |  |
| <i>Date Report forwarded to Care Home Manager:</i>              |  |

