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# Professional Carers

## Inspection report

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### Ratings

Overall rating for this service	Good ●
Is the service safe?	Good ●
Is the service effective?	Good ●
Is the service caring?	Good ●
Is the service responsive?	Good ●
Is the service well-led?	Good ●

# Summary of findings

## Overall summary

The inspection took place on 11 & 14 October 2016 and was unannounced.

The agency was last inspected on 04 & 08 September 2014 and met the standards required by legislation at that time.

The agency had a Registered Manager. A registered manager is a person who has registered with the Care Quality Commission to manage the service. Like registered providers, they are 'registered persons'. Registered persons have legal responsibility for meeting the requirements in the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and associated Regulations about how the service is run.

Accurate records were in place to monitor people's assessed risks, support and ongoing care needs.

Arrangements were in place to manage people's medicines safely which included staff training.

Excellent staff recruitment was in place and thoroughly explored people's suitability to work for the agency.

People's care plans guided staff on how a person liked and wished to be supported.

The agency had superb links with a range of healthcare and professional agencies so that people were supported with all aspects of their health and wellbeing.

Care records documented that without exception people and/or their relatives had been involved in the care planning process.

Staff received training and support which met and matched people's individual needs.

Staff performance was monitored and reviewed during supervisions, appraisals and spot checks to make sure staff were competent and confident providing effective care and support.

Staff took the time to get to know people well and to understand their needs.

Staff valued the experiences of those they supported.

Care records were reviewed and kept up to date to meet the person's current needs.

Staff knew their responsibility to report poor care practice or suspicion of harm.

There were effective joined up quality monitoring systems in place to assess the quality of the service

provided and ensure best possible practice.

People using the agency and their relatives felt listened to.

People using the service and the carers told us that they felt valued.

Staff working at Professional Carers felt supported and enabled by the management to fulfil their role and enrich people's lives.

## The five questions we ask about services and what we found

We always ask the following five questions of services.

### Is the service safe?

Good 

The service was safe.

Staff were aware of their responsibility to report any concerns about suspicion of harm.

People's medicines were managed and administered as prescribed.

People's needs were met by sufficient numbers of staff.

Checks were in place to ensure that staff were suitable to work with vulnerable people.

### Is the service effective?

Good 

The service was effective.

The provider was acting in accordance with the principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Staff received excellent training to support people's needs.

Staff worked collectively with other healthcare professionals and other services to help maintain people's wellbeing.

Staff performance was monitored to ensure outstanding support was delivered to individuals.

Staff had an excellent in depth knowledge and understanding of people's support needs

### Is the service caring?

Good 

The service was caring.

Staff showed thoughtful, caring relationships towards those they supported.

Care records were reviewed so that people's current needs were met.

Staff understood the need to promote dignity and privacy.

### **Is the service responsive?**

**Good** ●

The service was responsive.

Staff supported people to maintain their links with the local community and promoted social inclusion.

People's care needs were planned and discussed to make sure they met the individual's needs.

Systems were in place to listen to people's views and opinions.

Staff were motivated to work innovatively to provide good standards of care.

Staff embraced people's individuality when providing support.

### **Is the service well-led?**

**Good** ●

The service was well led.

There was a registered manager in place and an owner who took an active role to ensure that the agency's values were carried out.

Audits were undertaken to monitor, identify and drive forward any improvements needed.

People using the service, their relatives and the staff were able to comment on the quality of the service and felt listened to.

The agency benefits from strong leadership and a cohesive exceptional management team.

# Professional Carers

## Detailed findings

### Background to this inspection

We carried out this inspection under Section 60 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 as part of our regulatory functions. This inspection was planned to check whether the provider is meeting the legal requirements and regulations associated with the Health and Social Care Act 2008, to look at the overall quality of the service, and to provide a rating for the service under the Care Act 2014.

This inspection took place on 11 & 14 October 2016 and was unannounced.

The inspection was carried out by one adult social care inspector.

Before the inspection we reviewed all the information we already held on the service. Including the Provider Information Return (PIR). The PIR is a form that asks the provider to give some key information about the service. We also contacted the local authority contracts team manager who responded and reported they had not had any issues relating to the provider.

We reviewed eight care records of the 58 people supported with personal care by the agency and spoke with four people and their relatives receiving care and support over the course of the inspection. The agency also supports people with other aspects of the lives, such as shopping and cleaning. We looked at four staff recruitment files held at the premises and interviewed six care staff, we also met with five new staff starters who were attending the agency offices to complete their induction training. We saw a selection of records relating to the management of the service such as policies and procedures and complaints. We spoke with the registered manager who was in day to day control of the agency, met with the owner of the agency, members of the management team and senior care staff. Professional Carers is a family run business with members of the family taking active roles in the management of the service.

## Is the service safe?

### Our findings

We spoke with four people receiving personal care support from the agency. They told us that they felt safe, and they were well looked after by the agency. One person told us, "They [staff] do a good job, they are absolutely fabulous, mum feels very safe with them". "It's very nice to know that someone is keeping an eye on me". "They are all so lovely, very thoughtful". "Staff are very gentle and they take their time with me, I never feel rushed".

The risk of abuse was minimised because there were clear policies and procedures in place to provide staff with information on how to protect people in the event of an allegation or suspicion of abuse. The registered manager informed us that staff undertook training in how to safeguard adults and this was confirmed by staff that we spoke with. Staff were able to explain to us the types of abuse that people were at risk of, who they would report this to and where the relevant guidance was. Staff told us that they were confident that the management would address any concerns appropriately.

We saw that the provider had a whistleblowing policy in place. Staff were familiar with the term whistleblowing and each said they would report any concerns regarding poor practice they had to the manager. All staff confirmed that they were aware of the need to escalate concerns internally and report externally when they had concerns. This indicated that they were aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding the protection of vulnerable adults and the need to accurately record and report potential incidents of concern.

We spoke with five new members of staff who were attending their induction, staff who had not worked in care before were familiar with the term whistleblowing and could describe why people may be vulnerable and what signs they needed to look for while undertaking their duties. This demonstrated that the safeguarding induction training had been effective.

We spoke with the manager regarding the development of the business and she told us that they regularly recruited staff. Staff told us that they had heard of the agency by word of mouth and also the advertising banners outside the offices. We saw that agency had a lengthy, application process in place both an informal and formal interview process. This demonstrated that the manager understood the importance of having suitable staff in post to meet the needs of the people receiving support.

We checked six staff recruitment files and found that thorough processes were in place. We also looked at information held at the agency to confirm that staff had suitable Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. This service checks the suitability of people for working with vulnerable adults.

We found that carers received medication administration training and records were available to demonstrate that all staff had completed training and their competence had been assessed by senior staff. Procedures were also in place to manage covert medicine administration, that is when medication may be given disguised in food or drink. We saw that staff at the agency were aware how to support those people who lacked capacity to consent and processes were in place to involve family, the person's social worker

and the General Practitioner (GP) in making those decisions.

Individual risk assessments were completed for people who used the service and staff were provided with information as to how to manage risks so that harm to people was minimised. Each risk assessment had an identified hazard and management plan to reduce the risk. Staff were familiar with the risks and knew what steps needed to be taken to manage them. Records showed that staff took appropriate action following accidents or incidents.

We found that people had risk assessments in place which detailed the safety of people's homes as a prompt for staff in the event of an unforeseen emergency. This showed that there was information available for staff to evacuate people and themselves safely in the event of an emergency.

Staff told us, that except during periods of staff sickness, they generally supported the same people on a regular basis, which meant that people received care and support from people they knew.

We found no evidence of missed care calls, staff stayed the correct amount of time and people told us that they had regular carers. We saw that the agency had an on call system which included the owner, the manager and the deputy. This showed there was a contingency in place to cover staff in the event of unforeseen circumstances.

## Is the service effective?

### Our findings

One relative told us, "The staff are absolutely marvellous, they are really good with mum, they make her feel comfortable and safe."

We spoke with the Local Authority contracts team manager who told us that Professional Carers were reactive to service users' needs and proactive in resolving any issues that arose or gaps in the provision of care. We found that the agency worked tirelessly with other services in resolving issues for people.

The agency offices were open to members of the public, as well as those using the service. The reception area was comfortable and well laid out, there was a wealth of information available regarding advocacy, benefits, other professional services such as occupational health and will writing services to name a few. This was seen as a valuable resource for the local community where people dropped in for information and a cup of tea.

Care records we looked at showed that staff had made referrals to external health care professionals when needed. We saw that referrals had been made to occupational health to obtain necessary equipment to keep people safe. We saw that the agency consulted the local authority when they had concerns regarding housing. Good relationships were maintained with the local GP practices and families told us that staff were very prompt in raising concerns when people became unwell. The changes in people's health were documented in their care records. This information was also available to inform health professionals who became involved with their care, either through an identified need or an emergency situation. This demonstrated that the agency staff effectively supported people to access and receive on going healthcare support.

We found that the agency effectively managed identified risks for example they worked with the local fire service to help maintain safety in individual's homes. We saw records that risks identified either during care planning and/or reviews or whilst undertaking environmental risk assessment were referred to the fire officer. The agency worked well with the local fire service to support them with access to individual homes to install smoke detectors, or to deliver fire retardant bedding and bins. This showed us that the agency were effective in the management of risk. It also demonstrated that the agency worked well with other services to support people with their chosen lifestyles in the less restrictive and safe way.

We found that a number of people supported by the agency were living in difficult circumstances, either due to their environment, their mental health or their financial situation. Records demonstrated that the agency had involved relevant bodies such as the local council, building safety officers, mental health teams and environmental health to support people living as safely as possible. We also saw that those carers providing support to the individuals had been consulted and agreed to continue providing support often in very challenging circumstances. Staff told us that they were never asked to do anything that the owner, manager or the deputy would not do themselves. This demonstrated to us that the agency were prepared to work with the most vulnerable individuals in difficult circumstances whilst minimising the risk to staff safety and consulting with staff about their tolerance to situations.

Staff told us the support from the senior staff and management of the service was excellent. Six staff we interviewed said they received regular support and had met with senior staff regularly since they started work. They were aware this was to check they were competent in meeting the needs of the people they supported. Staff told us that they always worked with more experienced staff at the beginning until they were sure of what they were doing. Formal processes were in place to assess the quality of staff performance while supporting people, senior staff undertook unannounced visits to observe carers whilst supporting individuals. Staff told us they didn't mind this as it made sure they were working correctly and gave them opportunity to ask questions if they had any. Staff told us that the management team had high expectations of the way in which they worked and checked with them they were working to the high standard expected. In addition to on the job support, staff meetings and formal one to one supervision were planned and scheduled in advance. These processes gave staff the opportunity to discuss their performance and identify any training needs they had and the management team establish outstanding customer service.

We saw an annual planner for meeting with staff, observing practice and appraising staff performance. We saw that the management team worked together to achieve these meetings, with each person taking a role. This also meant that supervisions and appraisals were able to take place in the absence of the registered manager. This was an excellent plan of shared responsibility to ensure that staff regularly met with the senior team and evidence of good team work. Team members were able to meet with the management team as a minimum every four weeks.

We found that staff attended training, and a schedule of refresher training was monitored by the registered manager and the management team. Training relevant to staff roles such as; medicines administration, health and safety, food hygiene and moving and handling had been completed and was in date. Other training relevant to staff roles and to meet the needs of the people they support such as mental health, Parkinson's and dementia had been completed and kept under review. The supervision structure linked to the training plan and enabled the management team develop training needs and competencies. One staff member told us the training was the "best they had ever had".

We met both with current staff and the newly recruited staff who were attending induction, all staff we spoke with were enthusiastic about the training they received, one staff member told us, "Best care company I have ever worked for, by far". Staff told us that they believed by working hard and achieving qualifications they would be given opportunity to develop at the agency and this kept them motivated. All staff we spoke with could see themselves taking on more responsibility as they developed. One told us, "I feel listened to and valued, not only by the people I support, but also by the management team". We saw that Professional Carers had taken on board the Care Certificate this is a national induction programme developed to equip new staff working in care with knowledge and skills to deliver safe effective care.

We interviewed staff and found that they had an excellent in depth knowledge of the people they supported and their families. Care plans were written involving the person and/or their family and contained information for the reader of what the individual could do for themselves which supported and enabled people to remain in control and maintain a degree of independence. We found that staff not only knew the people they regularly supported but they knew other people supported by the agency. Staff told us that they were encouraged to know about everyone, and often had the opportunity to meet people at social events and this helped them to get to know individuals at a very personal level. Staff were passionate about people's histories, their lives and loves. We saw that people were valued for what they were and what they had achieved. Carers told us of learning skills and knowledge of history from the people they support, which demonstrated they respected those they cared for.

The provider had policies and procedures to provide guidance to staff on how to safeguard the care and

welfare of people using the service. This included guidance on the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 (MCA) provides a legal framework for making particular decisions on behalf of people who may lack the mental capacity to do so for themselves. The Act requires that, as far as possible, people make their own decisions and are helped to do so when needed. When they lack mental capacity to take particular decisions, any made on their behalf must be in their best interests and as least restrictive as possible.

Staff had received training relating to MCA 2005, staff commented that this was included as part of their induction. We spoke with staff who understood the importance of consent and people told us that staff sought their consent before carrying out any care support. We saw that people using the service and/or their relatives had been involved in planning their care and that staff consulted with them about their care needs.

## Is the service caring?

### Our findings

People had very positive comments about the service provided, people we spoke with and extracts from compliments cards at the office were as follows; "[staff name] and [staff name] are stars", "The carers are extremely good", "As a family we are extremely happy and appreciate the wonderful care the care workers give our mother", "They always put themselves out", and "Mum loves them, it's such a relief to me and gives me peace of mind, in fact she enjoys their visits more than mine!".

We spoke with the Local Authority contract department, who told us they had no concerns about the agency, that they were responsive, proactive, professional and supportive.

Staff work with a sense of community spirit and they take their role as carers seriously, in August one member of Professional Carers team achieved an outstanding contribution to care award, from an organisation called Progress to Excellence. Progress to Excellence Ltd has more than 20 years of experience in providing training and assessment for organisations. They are a specialist training provider supporting organisations of all sizes throughout England.

People's care records showed that staff had taken time to get to know people well, to understand their needs and develop respectful, caring relationships. One carer delivered a newspaper daily to one person as she passed by, we asked about this and she told us, "I know she likes the paper early and her call isn't until later so I just drop it through the door". People's care records were reviewed regularly and kept up to date so that they met their current needs.

Care staff told us that nobody is ever knowingly left in any difficulty, they described circumstances when the owner of the agency had paid for gas and electricity as it was the weekend and until appropriate services could be obtained. Staff told us that situations like that make them strive to deliver the amazing quality of care and respect to individuals as provided by the owner and managers.

Staff were aware they needed to promote privacy and dignity of the people they supported. Staff we spoke with demonstrated a good knowledge of how they would do this and how they would support people while maintaining their dignity. One relative told us that she never believed in a million years her mother would accept help with personal care. She said that because the staff were so gentle and patient and involved her mother with the process she was fine, in fact, she was "More than fine".

## Is the service responsive?

### Our findings

We saw photographs that a Christmas party in 2015 was well attended. We heard from staff that the entertainer they had booked had let them down at the last minute and staff conveyed the story that agency owner had almost "kidnapped" a local busker so not to let people down. This "can do" attitude was apparent in the business, in its staff and the people whom it served, staff and people receiving support told us they felt "valued" and "cared for". One person supported by the agency told us they can achieve anything because their carer made them feel special. One relative told us that their relative had been changed by the support from the carers and that they had "Brought her so much joy".

We heard from one person that she always gets a birthday card from the agency and a Christmas card. When we explored this further we found that this was common practice for all those receiving support from Professional Carers. This contributed to the feeling of inclusion and family which the agency strives for.

In addition we also saw photographs of another event when a bakery had recently donated cakes to the agency for the agency staff. The staff decided to share this with the people they support and this was turned into an event with care staff delivering cakes to people at home and making impromptu cups of tea, one person told us it was a lovely gesture and a real treat. This was an exceptional gesture where staff put the people using the service first and foremost.

We found many examples of activities delivered to people outside of the care package arrangements which extended to supporting people when socially isolated. We saw photographs around the agency offices of events that people using the service and their relatives had attended, such as a coffee mornings, bingo, MacMillan coffee morning and other social events.

One carer at the agency was setting up a cinema club and had found information relating to monthly showings of old movies at the local cinema and she was collecting names of those interested to make this a regular event followed by a cup of tea at a local café. She told us that the management of the agency encouraged all the staff to "think big and think outside the box" to support people.

When new to the service, people's care and support needs were considered and discussed by the agency to make sure staff had the right skills and the agency had the capacity to deliver the care. The agency assessment was undertaken by a member of the team, involving the individual and any appropriate family members. We found that staff had a broad depth of knowledge relating to services and benefits available to individuals and as identified in an earlier section leaflets advising people regarding their rights were given to relatives as necessary.

We also found that people called into the agency office for advice on all aspect of care, where to get information and how to access services.

We had the opportunity to speak with the local member of parliament during our visit, who told us that they had referred constituents to the agency and to social services when it had come to their attention that people were struggling or in difficulty, whether they received that information from a third party or from their

regular constituency surgery meetings.

Following an initial assessment the agency developed a person centred plan which identified how people liked their support to be delivered to meet their needs. People told us that they/ and or their relatives were involved throughout this process. We spoke with one family member who told us that English was not their relative's first language and they spoke very little English. The family told us that the carer had worked out how to communicate with their mum. He said "They have all been great". We spoke with the carer who described what she had learnt and what tools she used to communicate with the person and how she had researched the person's culture and found things on the internet. This showed that staff were able to embrace diversity and innovative in their approach to support.

Reviews were carried out on people's care records and observation of staff support to ensure that people's care needs remained up to date and records provided appropriate guidance for staff. Relatives we spoke with confirmed that care records were checked regularly and usually one of the "bosses" called in to check everything is ok. This meant that the provider involved people with the assessment and reviewing process so that they felt consulted, listened to and valued.

We looked at the findings and the analysis of the annual quality assurance survey and found further evidence that the provider valued the comments received regarding people's experiences of receiving care and support. Results had been collated and the management team had met to discuss were improvements could be made.

People we spoke with told us that they knew how and to whom they could complain, everybody we spoke with then went to great lengths to say that they had absolutely nothing to complain about. The annual quality assurance identified no complaints had been received between June 2015 and May 2016. Relatives told us that they felt very confident if they had any issues they would immediately be addressed and sorted. Staff we spoke with were aware of their responsibility to report matters to the office should anybody raise concerns with them directly.

## Is the service well-led?

### Our findings

There was a registered manager in place, the owner of the business was also an active member of the staff team. They were both supported by experience office staff and senior carers and care staff.

Comments included in the quality assurance surveys regarding staff performance had been discussed with staff in the one to one meetings, comments from surveys such as, "[name of staff] lights up my life", [name of staff] is exceptional she always seems to motivate me. These comments had been passed to the appropriate member of the team demonstrating staff were valued by the provider.

We also looked at the findings of the staff survey and found their experience of working for Professional Carers was positive. The best agency ever, [name of management] is amazing, the whole team is fabulous and so supportive to mention a few.

Regular staff meetings were held which enabled staff to share information and learning. We saw that staff had been brought together following a recent event of a fire in an individual's home as identified in the effective section of this report. They took the opportunity to meet and reflect on their practice and work with the local fire officer to identify anybody else who may be at risk. This demonstrated the provider strived to provide person centred care and that they learned from events.

The owner, manager, senior staff and carers we spoke with all referred to the "extended family", carers told us that they supported people as though it was their relative and how they would like their mothers to be cared for in the same situation. We found that this ethos came from the top and the owner of the agency showed passion for delivering good quality care and support and compassion for those receiving support.

We found the care staff at the agency engaging, open and interested in the work of CQC. Staff told us that the management team regularly spoke with them about regulation and this was apparent in the way they confidently engaged with us during the inspection process. Staff were professional and saw themselves positively as carers and this has to be due to the excellent training and support given by the management team and high expectations of them to perform their role to the best possible standard from the owner.

The manager told us that the ethos of the organisation was very important that it was a family run business and served the community where they lived. That they wanted to provide the best care and support to people in a dignified, respectful way. There was a statement of purpose and service user guide. All staff were told about the ethos and values of the service during their induction and attended induction with the owner of the business. She told us that this was important to her as she liked to get to know the staff from the start and used the time to instil in them the importance of good quality care and support, wanting it to be as good as what they would expect for their own loved ones. We saw that the service had a clear vision, mission statement and values which were available for people to access through information provided within the care folders.

People who used the service, their relatives, the local authority contracting team and the local MP spoke

highly of the care and support delivered by Professional Carers. People told us that they could contact the office or the on call any time of day and they would be listened to, the local authority told us the agency was approachable, reactive and responded well to situations and crises.

We saw that the management of the agency encouraged staff to engage with the local community and involve people with broadening their horizons like joining the cinema group or attending coffee mornings where they could meet other people in similar situations to themselves. Photographs on the walls of the agency demonstrated these were well attended and joyous occasions.

People using the service and their relatives without exception praised the staff at the agency. One relative told us that the support given to her mother in such a loving and caring way had given mum back to her. She told us it made her very emotional but credit was due to the marvellous service from them.

Staff without exception spoke of what they described as the fantastic agency they worked for, they were enthusiastic, knowledgeable and each person told us it was their role to give the best possible love, care and support to the people they visited. Members of staff we spoke with told us and described the support they gave to people but also how much they valued the personal support given to them from the management, not only with personal matters but in helping them develop skills and qualifications. Staff told us they felt valued. This demonstrated effective recruitment, retention and management of the staff team to develop outstanding carers delivering quality care.

We saw that the service took on complicated packages of care, sometimes in challenging conditions and we saw that they managed these well by involving the staff in the decision making processes and by the correct deployment of staff. We found many examples of the agency working in collaboration with other services and agencies, the fire service, building regulators, the local authority and environmental health. The agency did this to excellent effect enabling people to continue living in their own homes.

Feedback on the quality of the service was regularly sought by various surveys, questionnaires, telephone calls, and personal visits by the management team. Improvements had been made to aid communication with the production of a regular newsletter following a suggestion received showing they are a listening organisation.

Regular checks on the quality of the service also included checking records held at the agency offices this included but was not limited to care records, recruitment files, staff training and risk assessments. Spot checks were also carried out in respect of staff performance and competency. This demonstrated that the organisation wanted to learn and make necessary improvements to promote quality care.

The agency had a whistleblowing policy to inform staff how they could raise concerns, both within the organisation and with outside statutory agencies. This meant there was an alternative way of staff raising concerns if they felt unable to raise them with the registered manager.

We had been notified of reportable incidents as required under the Health and Social Care Act 2008.