

# Enter & View

## Briars Barn

30th January 2019  
Report



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Part of the Healthwatch Staffordshire remit is to carry out Enter and View Visits. Healthwatch Staffordshire Authorised Representatives will carry out these visits to health and social care premises to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The Health and Social Care Act allows Authorised Representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies. Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation – so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand. Healthwatch Staffordshire Enter and View visits are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch Staffordshire safeguarding policy, the service manager will be informed and the visit will end. The Local Authority Safeguarding Team will also be informed.

## **Provider Details**

Provider: Briars Barn Ltd.  
Address: Station Road, Polesworth, Tamworth, B79 0EH  
Service Type: Adults with learning disabilities  
Date of Visit: 30th January 2019

## **Authorised Representatives**

This visit was made by two Authorised Representatives of Healthwatch Staffordshire.

## **Purpose of Visit**

Healthwatch Staffordshire is making a series of visits to Day Services throughout the county in order to report on the range and quality of these services. Each service will have an individual report and an overview report on Day Services in Staffordshire will be compiled once the visits are completed.

A good service should...

1. Have strong, visible management
2. Have staff with time and skills to do their jobs
3. Have good knowledge of each individual client, their needs and how their needs may be changing.
4. Offer a varied programme of activities unless a specific service is offered.
5. Offer quality and choice to their clients around food and mealtimes, where applicable.
6. Accommodate clients personal, cultural and lifestyle needs.
7. Be an open environment where feedback is actively sought and used

The methodology to be used is to;

- Consider the care and services offered and whether this is delivered in a way that promotes dignity and independence.
- Consider staffing levels and the level of the care provided.
- Talk to people using the service, if they are happy and willing to do so to gain their views on the opportunities available to them.
- Talk to relatives, if they are available to ask if they are happy with the care provided to their relatives and whether they are aware and feel able to report any concerns/ complaints.
- Consider staff training and the support offered to enable staff to do their jobs well.
- Observe interaction at all levels between clients, staff, Manager, and visitors.

**NOTE: People with learning disabilities attending Briars Barn are called colleagues by the manager and staff, and not clients or service users. For clarity, and comparability between reports and in any overview report, they are described here as service users.**

## Physical Environment

### External

The entrance is clearly signposted in Station Road.

A long drive, unsurfaced but in reasonable condition and with clear 5mph speed limit signs, leads to a visitors' parking area. Reception is signposted from the courtyard entrance but around a corner and not immediately obvious. Once inside the courtyard, the entrance to the main building is clear and has level access.

The centre comprises several buildings around courtyards. The main building, a former barn, looked well maintained outside. Nearby Portacabins, with added ramp access, looked quite old but in fair condition. Stables around a second courtyard appeared similarly satisfactory.

While outside, we noted that paths and ramps had been well salted on what was an icy day. We were told that the manager salts surfaces and checks for safety before users arrive.

The centre has gardens located at the front of building which include lawns, flowerbeds, trees and seating. It is secure and safe. There is also an area for horticultural activities, described below

CCTV was not obvious, but we were told it is used for monitoring access and to maintain the safety of people across the site.

## Internal

The reception area is in a downstairs foyer area with sofas, drinks machines etc. It was always busy.

A visitors' book is kept near the front door, on a table just inside the entrance. We were asked to sign in and out.

No human odours were detected. Outside, there were animal smells aplenty!

The décor in the main buildings appeared well-maintained. Workshops were clearly in regular active use, and their appearance understandably reflected this. All rooms seen had appropriate décor, varying from homely in sitting areas, to functional in dining and work areas.

A wide variety of equipment was observed and explained. All appeared appropriate to the needs and abilities of service users.

All furniture looked appropriate and fit for purpose. Sofas in the foyer were being well used. Artworks relevant to the functions of rooms looked helpful and cheerful.

The layout of the main building has few corridor areas or corners. In work areas, the amount of materials and equipment on floors and surfaces appeared proportionate and appropriate to the activities being undertaken at the time of the visit.

Indoor areas all looked clean. Outside areas and some rooms accessed from outside were as one would expect when in active use in mid-winter.

Inside toilets were seen but not inspected. Outside toilets were located near to outside activities. These were basic and unheated but had all necessary equipment and materials in them.

## Client Numbers

Briars barn can accommodate a maximum of 40 service users a day. They currently have 58 throughout the week with variable packages of support

## Staff Numbers

Type of staff	Total	Morning	Afternoon
Trained / Qualified Activity Leaders	15	Variable depending on day - up to 11 direct support staff on duty	
Administration	1	1	1
Management	2	2	2
Catering		Included in Activity staff	

## **Management**

**Management - A good service should have strong visible management.**

**The manager should be visible within the service, provide good leadership to staff and have the right experience for the job.**

### **Our findings**

The manager was visible and on hand throughout our visit and was clearly known and liked by service users.

All staff spoken to thought highly of the manager, both as a manager and as someone who ensures a person-centred, user-involved, approach to everything that happens at Briars Barn.

Those service users able to express their views told us that they like the manager and staff and go to them if they need help or have any problems.

### **Comments**

The Director of Care Services has managed Briars Barn for seven years. All that we saw and heard confirmed the view of staff and service users that the centre is well-led.

## **Staff Experiences and Observations**

**Quality Indicator 2 - Have the staff the time and skills to do their jobs**

**Staff should be well-trained, motivated and feel they have the resources to do their job properly.**

### **Our findings**

We were told that staff turnover is low, but that when recruitment does take place, service users are involved in what is a three-stage interview process:

1. With staff
2. With service users
3. With staff / manager

New staff are given a two-week induction period and a six-month training and development programme.

Mandatory training includes:

Fire Awareness, Safeguarding, Epilepsy Awareness, Buccal Midazolam, Medication Awareness & Observations, Person Centred Thinking Stage 1, Person Centred Thinking Stage 2, Health & Safety, Autism Awareness, Think Positive about people who may challenge, Visual Impairment Awareness, Mental Capacity Act & DOLS, Moving & Handling, Communication, Report writing.

Additional Training is available, including:

Dementia awareness, any training specific to job role, C & G Level II Diploma in Care following probation, Professional Personalities, Food Hygiene.

All the staff we spoke to were open and approachable, and happy to speak about their work and the skills they bring and apply.

We did not observe staff under pressure or rushing. All appeared to have time to undertake their roles and involve service users at every stage.

All staff carry two-way radios, which help them co-ordinate activities across the site, check who is where, and summon help if needed. We saw and heard these in frequent use and observed how they contribute to efficient use of resources across a dispersed site.

We saw and heard constructive and relaxed staff interactions concerning individuals and groups of service users which led us to conclude that morale and teamwork are good.

## Comments

From observation and discussion, we concluded that Briars Barn has a strong and stable workforce, which is not only appropriately skilled and qualified, but also works constructively and sympathetically with service users on a broad range of meaningful, stimulating and educational activities.

## Quality Indicator 3 - Do staff have good knowledge of each individual client, their needs and how their needs may be changing

**Staff should be familiar with clients' histories and preferences and have processes in place for how to monitor any changes in wellbeing.**

## Our findings

We were told that service users come from schools, transition and other services, and by word of mouth.

Typically, a one-day visit to the centre precedes a primary assessment, followed by professional reports and production of a support plan with service user, carers and professionals.

A small percentage of referrals do not lead on to attendance. Reasons include:

- need for 2:1 support, which could impact negatively on use of space and other service users
- need for use of a hoist - space and layout would make this difficult
- behaviour that challenges to the extent that would disrupt and disturb other service users. The centre has plans to bring into use another building on the site to cater for people with more complex needs

We were told that individual service user histories and preferences are established through primary assessment, professional reports, leading to an individual support plan, which is shared with staff with the individual and with family/carers.

Regular reviews take place and are shared with staff and carers. We were told that statutory reviews undertaken by local authorities are often neither comprehensive nor helpful. There are also instances where improvement achieved by Briar's Barn leads to questions over future funding levels.

Reasons why users leave the service are mainly the result of decisions by external stakeholders:

- Local authority policies, such as Staffordshire's 'go local' initiative, the centre being (just) in Warwickshire
- Family decisions
- Move on to supported living
- Move to full-time support by Personal Assistants

We were also told that triggers of adverse events in individuals on the autistic spectrum are understood by staff enabling immediate response and de-escalation. During our visit we saw one brief episode of mildly challenging behaviour which was quickly defused by the staff member present, who clearly understood the service user's needs and personality.

All staff receive safeguarding training. Service users told us they would speak to staff if they had any problems.

We were told that staff have been DBS checked and are also regularly re-checked in accordance with regulations.

## Comments

It became evident to us through observation and discussion that the staff know and understand the service users as individuals, are aware of their histories, needs and preferences, and are responsive to any changes.



## Activities

### Quality Indicator 4 - Activities - Does the service offer a varied programme of activities?

Services should provide a wide range of activities and support clients to take part in activities, unless the service offers a specific type of service rather than a wider range of opportunities.

#### Our findings

Service users, supported by a member of staff, showed us around the facilities:

In the **main building**, we saw:

**Independent living skills kitchen.** This is used for training in cooking, baking, and ironing. A service user showed us an album of photographs of recent commissioned iced and decorated celebration cakes. We were told that a 'Bake-off' competition is being arranged.

**Art studio.** This was not being used during our visit, but we were told that art, craft and textile projects, painting and modelling take place. We were shown textiles, Mother's Day packages, jewellery and ornaments at various stages of production. It was explained to us that activities are all supervised and tailored to users' levels of fine motor skills, these being individually assessed. This room is locked when not in use because of the presence of scissors and other tools.

**Quiet room.** This softly lit and furnished space is used for 'time-outs' and relaxation when needed.

In **Portacabins** in the courtyard, we visited:

**Drama studio** (formerly an office). This is used for drama, keep fit, and also as a staff room with lockers

**IT room.** Service users explained what they do in this room. We were shown current projects, including images and words about Australia, and copying pictures from on-line catalogues as potential purchases.

In the **stable block**, we were shown:

**Workshop.** We were told that this was set up about 6 months ago. Furniture restoration with decoration and decoupage was taking place, using donated items. Work is in progress on a marketing and sales strategy for the 'Turnaround' products, using Facebook etc.

Outside, we were shown:

**Garden area.** This is fully accessible, fenced, with a hard surface and partly covered. Tables and shelving are used for horticultural activities, growing seedlings etc.

**Animal areas.** We were shown sheep, alpacas and Shetland ponies in paddocks, two small friendly goats in a pen (later seen being walked on leads by service users), and chickens (from which service users collect eggs). All are looked after by service users: feeding, mucking out, grooming etc., activities we observed being carried out with enthusiasm.

Most outside areas are fully accessible. We were told that a wheelchair user helps with animal husbandry.

We were also told of further activities which take place off-site. These include:

- Service users helping out at local shops and services, including a bookshop and Tamworth Mobility Centre
- Recent gardening assistance at the Staffordshire Regimental Museum and the National Memorial Arboretum
- Litter picking
- Helping with bingo at a local care home

Other periodic events described to us included:

- Coffee mornings
- Fashion show
- Weekend parties
- Social evenings / special event nights
- Participation in RSPB Birdwatch

Other activities available include;

- Textiles (Social Enterprise)
- Office support
- Catering
- Citizenship
- Divas
- Turnaround (Social Enterprise)
- Event Management
- Car Wash (Social Enterprise)
- Out & About
- Gym Access
- Bespoke visits / trips out according to interests

Service users are provided with activities to maintain their physical health. Keep fit sessions take place in the drama room and about 10 service users attend a local gym. Sponsored walks take place. Many of the activities at Briar's Barn, especially outdoors, are physical in nature.

Group activities appeared tailored to the ability and interests of service users. While all can access group activities, not all would all be suitable for everybody.

We were told that a service user (not present during our visit) who is a wheelchair user can access, and benefit from, all or most of the activity areas, both inside and outside.

We were told that there is a user-led events team. There was a go-karting outing in 2018. For 2019, users have suggested: zoo, canoeing, Snowdome, cycling, horse-riding, and a canal boat trip. With support, users are exploring the feasibility of each of these, including accessibility, and will come up with proposals.

Birthdays and special days are celebrated (with card, cake, and singing). This includes special baking in the Independent Living Skills kitchen.

Some but not all users can go out from the centre if accompanied. Station Road into Polesworth, without pavements and crossing a narrow railway bridge, are adverse factors. Personal assistants accompany some users. Taxi are also used.

Service users are supported with individual hobbies and interests. On the day of our visit, a service user was being taken to a local recording studio to record a song.

We observed combined weekly activity plans for each service on the noticeboard, and a service user showed us their individual plan which they carried with them. We were told that sometimes a service user rejects something on their plan, in which case an alternative is negotiated.

Training is provided to service users during many of the activities described above, both those based at the centre and those taking place out in the community.

Four social enterprises operate from the centre, including the sale of horticultural products and the restored and decorated furniture.

## Comments

The centre delivers an impressive variety of activities, tailored to individual needs, which seek to enhance skills and reduce dependency. Its semi-rural location is not perceived as a barrier to active involvement and engagement with local communities.

## Catering Services

### Quality Indicator 5 - Catering - Does the service offer quality, choice around food and mealtimes?

**If relevant, Services should offer a range of meal choices and adequate support to help clients who may struggle to eat and drink and accommodate different preferences and needs around individual dietary requirements.**

#### Our findings

The week's lunch menu (including pictures of food) was seen on a noticeboard and in the dining area. On the day of our visit, two choices of lunch main course (soup or sandwiches) and of pudding were seen (and eaten). A hot meal is served every day of the week.

Staff are aware of dietary preferences and allergies. We were told that there are currently no service users for whom religious practice affects dietary requirements, but these would be observed if notified, including which ingredients it would be appropriate for the service user to handle when assisting with the preparation of meals. However, the service supports many variable diets such as allergy related diets, low fat and low cholesterol diets.

Many service users collected their own lunch; some others were served by staff or personal assistants. We saw service users eating and spoke to some, who said that they enjoyed their lunches.

It was explained to us that the serving station equipment with hot plate area was out of service and awaiting repair or replacement, meaning that food was being served directly from the kitchen door, but this did not appear to disrupt service users' routines or affect the quality or timeliness of the meal.

The food we saw and ate was simple but tasty - the vegetable soup (served with bread and butter) was hot, but not too hot. The sandwiches were also good.

We observed a little prompting and encouragement from staff and personal assistants, but most service users did not need much if any assistance with eating their lunch.

We saw a drinks station in the foyer / sitting area being used at 'elevenses' and after lunch, and were told that light refreshments are always available on request

We did not see any service users needing or using specialised crockery or utensils.

The dining room is laid out with tables for 2 and 4. We surmised that most service users had a favourite table or chair. Our presence necessitated some shuffling around, but this did not appear to disrupt routines. There was also space for personal assistants to eat with their clients. It appeared to us, though we did not enquire, that the less able service users, and those with potentially more challenging behaviour, sat at the smaller tables near the edges of the room. We noted cheerful restaurant and café-related signs and artworks on the walls.

## Quality Indicator 6 - Does the service accommodate clients personal, cultural and lifestyle needs?

**Services should be set up to meet residents' cultural, religious and lifestyle needs as well as their care needs, and shouldn't make people feel uncomfortable if they are different or do things differently to other clients.**

### **Our findings**

As described above, we observed that service users have choice over food and drink.

We were told that none of the current service users has a religious faith or heritage needing to be considered in designing activities for them, or in the preparation and provision of food and drink. We were, however, assured that if this was an issue, it would be fully addressed.

Service users have individual support plans. From observation, it was evident to us that each one takes part in a wide variety of meaningful and constructive activities appropriate to their abilities and motivation. Some service users bring their personal assistants to support them at the centre.

Throughout our visit we observed staff always treating service users with respect and dignity.

The service offers a transport element as part of their service if it is required. Some users are brought to Briar's Barn by family carers or by their personal assistants. We were told that the centre has a car with trained drivers, for outings. Bus use is sometimes an option: following negotiation, Arriva Midlands will stop a fare-stage service towards Polesworth at the end of the drive on prior request, but not in the opposite direction as there is no safe alighting point on the grass verge.

### **Comments**

The service users appeared to us to get on well together. Differences in level of ability, appearance and behaviours did not seem to be issues for them.

## **Client Experiences and Observations**

Those service users able to express their views to us said that they enjoy their days at Briars Barn. Those without speech appeared happy in the tasks we saw them undertaking.

## **Family / Carers experiences (if available)**

No family members or carers were present during our visit, though several personal assistants were. We were, however, told that family and carers are welcome at Briars Barn at any time.

Contact logs and review forms are shared with relatives and carers, to inform them of the service user's progress and any matters of which they should be aware.

We were told that relatives and carers often approach the centre for signposting to other sources of funding and support.

**Quality Indicator 7 - The service should be an open environment where feedback is actively sought and use.**

**There should be mechanisms in place for clients and relatives to influence what happens in the service, such as a Clients and Relatives Committee or regular meetings. The process for making comments or complaints should be clear and feedback should be welcomed and acted on.**

## **Our findings**

We were welcomed by members of the Colleagues Council. This meets monthly, has representatives from staff and service users, and is chaired (with support) by a service user. A newsletter is produced.

Service user members of the Council gave us a helpful explanation about the centre and what they do there.

Briars Barn has a fundraising element which is called "Friends Of". It was emphasized to us that this raises funds for user 'experiences' and not to underwrite core services.

The centre has a complaints procedure which is given to family carers. A copy will be supplied to Healthwatch.

## **Comments**

When asked about any recent changes in response to feedback or suggestions from service users and / or relatives, the manager told that a request for a service user to be able to eat their lunch in a quieter place than the noisy dining room resulted in allocation of a separate quiet space.

## **Additional Information**

Briars Barn is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday

Costs vary, dependent on a personalized, needs based assessment, with all activity costs, 2 course lunch and refreshments included.

Briars Barn operates a PA Service, where people can bring their own support and use any of the facilities on offer for a morning or afternoon session at a set rate which includes lunch - a small additional charge is made for PA lunch.

## **Comments**

The PA service helps people to access the service. This is because some individuals cannot fund a direct placement but with this service, they can still enjoy what is on offer with their own support team. It enables friendships to develop also.

## **Summary, Comments and Further Observations**

Our observation and discussions led us to conclude that Briar's Barn is well-led, with experienced and committed staff who provide a very wide range of person-centred, user- influenced, meaningful and purposeful day opportunities for the users of its services, tailored to individual abilities, needs and preferences.

Although in a relatively isolated position, the centre also demonstrated significant links and engagement with local communities.

## **Comments**

We would like to thank all the Colleagues and Staff for welcoming us to Briars Barn and being so friendly and helpful throughout our visit.

## **Recommendations and Follow-Up Action**

We have no recommendations for change or improvement at this centre as they are not needed.

## **Provider Feedback**

The Manager of Briar's Barn provided feedback about the visit as follows:

When asked what they felt worked well about the way the Authorised Representatives carried out the visit, they responded;

*Ease and ability to interact with people using the service. Full explanation of the purpose and process of the visit and what would happen thereafter.*

*Appropriate amount of time spent visiting different departments and of gathering information.*

When asked if there were any aspects of the Enter and View visit which you felt did not work well or could be improved, they responded;

***None at all - it was well executed and informative.***

When asked, as a provider of a service, did the Enter and View visit help you to identify areas for improvement and if so, in what way, they responded;

***As the report indicates, there were no areas of improvement suggested however, we are always self-auditing and are welcome suggestions and ideas.***

Additional comments were made as follows;

***We were delighted with your findings. We always welcome feedback on our service so that we can deliver not only what people really want to do but what enables them to be an equal citizen who is able to purposefully contribute.***

**DISCLAIMER**

*Please note that this report only relates to findings we observe on the specific date of our visit. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all residents and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.*



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