



Are you considering supported living for an adult with a learning disability?



Highfield Services is the trading name of Highfield Scheme Limited.

Dear Reader

I hope this booklet provides you with the relevant information, should you be considering a placement within a supported living home for adults with learning disabilities. By reading this the aim is to get you to look at all local availability, and to ask the right questions to the right people at the right time.

My company is one of many local providers offering a supported living arrangement for adults with learning disabilities, and what suits one person may well not suit another.

The landlord responsible for the houses we support is called Rishwood Homes Ltd, who are responsible for each persons' tenancy agreements and receive the rents usually achievable from housing benefits and a small top up from each tenant.

My company, HIGHFIELD SCHEME Ltd now trades under the name of HIGHFIELD SERVICES and from the first home set up in June 1986, every few years later another house has been setup, at present there are eight shared houses. In 2009 the daycare and community centre was opened to provide activities for any adult with a learning disability, no matter who are their supporting company.

In addition to this booklet we also provide a leaflet introducing to the company's management team, and a full or an easy read service user guide on what we have to offer and details of our daycare and community centre called THE BASE in Great Harwood.

Thank You

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About this guide

Whether you're choosing a supported living for yourself or for a relative, finding the information you need to make a good choice can be challenging. You may find yourself making a choice in a hurry, for example because an illness or accident means you can no longer manage at home.

The pressure to find a supported living home quickly can mean things that would be important to you if you were moving home under different circumstances get pushed to one side.

In this guide, we look at what to consider when choosing a supported living home. As well as the essential practical questions like cost and location, it's important to think about what you actually want from a home and whether a supported living home is actually the best option.

1. Planning a move to a supported living arrangement

If you're considering a move to a supported living home, you should get an assessment of your care needs from your local council. This will look at what support or care you might need and the best way for you to get it – it might even turn out that a supported living home isn't the best option.

If you can, it's a good idea to start planning sooner rather than later. You'll have a greater choice and more control over the situation if you can start thinking about the options before you need to move. You could start by talking to friends and relatives about the kind of home you would like. It might be reassuring to know your wishes will be considered if you're not able to make decisions or communicate them when the time comes to move.

Realistically, advance planning sometimes won't be possible. In many cases, a move to a supported living home will be prompted by a crisis and carried out in a rush. If you're choosing a supported living home for someone else, you may not be sure where to start. This guide explains the important things to consider even if you don't have much time to make your decision.

2. Where to start

Your first step should be to arrange a care needs assessment to establish exactly what your needs are. Get started by contacting the adult social services department of your local council. If you're in hospital, this may be arranged for you.

If you could do with some extra help but want to stay independent, don't assume a supported living home is the only option. Depending on your health and care needs and situation, you could benefit from adaptations to your current home, disability equipment, or arranging for a 'home carer' to come into where you are living now.

If your assessment finds that supported living care is suitable for you, you should be told what type of accommodation would best meet your needs. During a care needs assessment, you should be in the driving seat. The assessor should always listen to your views and what you say. It's an opportunity for you to discuss your needs and wishes. Even if you are planning to pay a contribution to your fees, don't be tempted to skip getting a care needs assessment. It will give you an expert's view on what care you need, which you'll need to know to select the right type of supported living setting.

If you don't agree with the result of your assessment contact your local Advocacy Services.

Financial Assessments

After your care needs assessment, the council will look at your finances to work out if you qualify for council help to pay your care fees. Councils will only contribute to care you've been assessed as needing, so you must have a care needs assessment if you want help to pay your fees.

Whether or not you qualify for financial help towards your care fees, the council must provide information about care providers in the area and where possible, the likely costs of care. Paying for care is complex and expensive, so make sure you look into this thoroughly.

NHS Continuing Healthcare

If you have particularly complex health and care needs, you might be eligible for NHS Continuing Healthcare. You'll be given a separate assessment to work out whether you qualify. If you do, the NHS will pay for some of your care.

3. Practical questions

Choosing a supported living home can be daunting, but a few key questions can help to get you started.

What care do I need?

After your care assessment, you should be given a copy of the assessment's conclusions. If you're not given this, ask for it. It will explain what your care needs are and the best way to meet them. If the assessment decides a supported living home is the best option for you, you'll need to choose a home that can meet your needs. If the council is paying for your care, they won't pay for an unsuitable home. Don't make assumptions about what a supported living home will offer – if you need something specific, check they can provide it.

Types of supported living home arrangements

Homes offer up to 24-hour help with personal care, which includes things like washing, getting to the toilet, eating and drinking, and taking medication. Nursing care is not included. Supported living homes might be a good option if you know your care needs are likely to increase. If you're living in a supported living home that only offers minimal care you might have to move if you later need more complex care.

All care providers should offer social activities and outings suitable for peoples' needs, and where possible people need to make everyday decisions as their daily routines – what to eat, where to go, bedtimes and such like.

What if your needs change?

If you know your need for medical care is likely to increase, supported living care settings are unlikely to be able to meet your needs if you require more nursing care.

Are there places available?

Once you know what area you want to move to, have a look at the supported living homes that are available and check if they have places. If your preferred home doesn't have any vacancies, you might want to join a waiting list or choose an alternative home. You might know of supported living homes in your local area or have had recommendations from someone you know. You could also contact your council to ask for a list of local homes.

4. How to choose

Once you have an idea of the available options, you might find you still have a long list of potential homes. Narrow down your choices by thinking about your personal preferences and looking at what the experts say are sign of a good supported living home. Social workers or nurses are not allowed to make personal recommendations.

What's good for one person isn't always good the next, is it?

If you're choosing a home for someone else, chat to them about what would make them feel comfortable in a supported living home. If they're not able to communicate their wishes, think about that you know about them and what they might find familiar or welcoming. Here are a few questions you might want to consider when drawing up a shortlist.

Location

- Do you want to stay in the same area?
- Do you want to move to be near family or friends?
- Would you prefer to be in a town centre or a more rural area? You might want to think about how easy it would be for you to get out an about if you're able to, or for people to visit you.

Garden

- Is there a garden?
- Are people allowed to do any gardening themselves?

Rooms

- How big are the rooms?
- Can you take any of your own furniture with you?

Other service users at the home

- How many service users are there?
- How old are they?
- What is the age range?
- What disabilities?
- How active are they?
- What opportunities are there to socialise with others?
- Are they getting out and about to activities?

“Some of the nicest homes I have seen have been ones where there’s a cat just wandering around. It gets on people’s laps and they get pleasure from stroking the cat.”

Pets

- Can you take a pet with you?
- Does the home have its own pets?
- If there are pets in the home, can you avoid them, for example if you have an allergy?
- Can pets visit?

Independence

- Will you be able to make decisions about your own routine, such as when you get up and go to bed?
- Will you be able to make your own food or drinks when you want to?
- Will you be able to go outside- for example, to the garden – when you want to?

Visitors

- Can you have visitors whenever you like?
- Are children allowed?
- Are there places for you to spend time with your visitors?

Food

- How much choice of food is there?
- How much variety is there in the menus?
- Can you eat any meals in your room? Or will they all be taken in a dining room?

Entertainment

- Are outings offered and how often?
- Will you have access to books and newspapers?

Access to healthcare

- What are the arrangements for seeing a GP?
- How easy is it to see a GP out of hours?
- If you're staying in the local area, can you continue to see your own GP?
- Do other healthcare professionals such as district nurses, physiotherapists, dentists or chiropodists visit the home?

Cultural or religious requirements

- Will you be able to get to a place of worship easily or do local religious leaders visit?
- Is the home able to cater for particular dietary requirements?
- Can all your cultural needs be accommodated?
- Do any staff members speak your first language?

Advice for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people

Supporting living homes must not discriminate against people on the grounds of sexual orientation and they also have a duty to promote equality of opportunity. When choosing a home, you could ask whether staff receive any training on LGBT issues, or what the policy is for dealing with discrimination. If you need advice, Stonewall Housing provides specialist housing advice for LGBT people (020 7359 5767, stonewallhousing.org).

Important things to check

There are certain things that can indicate a home is good, which might not occur to you initially – for example, how long the staff stay in their jobs and whether they receive comprehensive training. You might be able to find out this information before visiting. If not, you could ask staff while you're there or bear it in mind when observing how the home runs.

Care Quality Commission rating

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of services in England. It regularly inspects services to check whether they meet government standards. You can search for local providers on their website and check how they have been rated. Ratings range from outstanding to inadequate.

Staff turnover

How long staff are happy to work in any setting can give you an idea of its quality. It may not be possible to find this out in advance, but you can ask.

“I went on the Quality Care Commission website. I was surprised to find a service around the corner from me that looks quite a nice place on the face of it. But it’s actually rated inadequate, so you can’t tell.”

Staffing levels

The CQC reports comments on this, but there is no set ratio of staff to service users that is considered good or bad. The CQC just states that staffing should be adequate to cover the needs of everyone at all times. The best way to judge this will probably be to visit and observe or just ask questions:

- Do there seem to be enough staff?
- Do problems get resolved quickly?
- Do staffing levels drop at night or weekends

Staff qualifications and training

The CQC says that staff and managers should receive the training they need to carry out their work. CQC reports assess this. You could also ask providers how their staff are trained and what qualifications they have.

Visiting times

Visiting should be 24 hours a day. If the home has set visiting hours, that could be a negative sign.

5. Do your research

You will probably find that you get a feel for what you're looking for once you start viewing supported living homes. However, you can make this task easier by being prepared from the very first visit. Once you have worked out the area you want to live in, the type of support you need you can start your research into suitable homes.

It's a good idea to have a checklist. You think of all sorts of questions after you have been, but when you are actually there you don't think to ask them. Then you wish you'd thought to say so and so.

Get a list of providers

This could be from the council, a hospital (if you're moving to a home after a hospital stay), or the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Read CQC reports

The CQC inspects and reviews all settings in England. Their inspectors usually visit unannounced, talk to staff and service users, and check systems and processes. They check that homes are safe, effective, caring, well-led, and responsive to people's needs. They use this information to give each provider a rating of outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate. If services need to improve, the CQC tells them what changes have to be made and gives them a deadline for improvement.

Other places to look

You might be able to get personal recommendations, or you can look for reviews. These can be a useful guide, but home choice is personal and what is suitable for one person may not work for another. Many supported living homes will also have their own websites.

Make a shortlist

Make a list of a few preferred homes that you would like to visit or contact for more details. You might want to check if they have spaces available at this point.

6. Visiting a supported living home

Before your visit

It's a good idea to contact your chosen service in advance, in particular if you haven't been able to find out answers to practical questions, such as what their visiting arrangements are. You can also ask them for a brochure. As well as looking at the information they send, you can consider the speed and quality of their replies and their willingness to supply information. These could be good indicators of the attitude of the service.

Planning your visit

A brochure is no substitute for a visit. If you can, try to look round several accommodations, as you will probably get more of an idea of what you're looking for after you've seen a few. Take a checklist with you and don't be afraid to ask lots of questions.

"I went to one place in particular that was awful. That made me think, right, when I go to the next one, I've got loads of boxes I want to tick."

Trial stays or introductory visits are a good idea – many supported living homes offer them. If you're choosing a home for someone else, you might want to pay an initial visit on your own, and then take them with you for a second visit or arrange a trial stay if it seems promising. Some people worry that they may not get an accurate picture of a home when they visit. You could consider dropping in unannounced for a snapshot of what life there is like. Or you could plan an arranged visit first and then go back unannounced.

What to consider on your visit

It's a good idea to go prepared with a list of questions and a checklist. Include your personal preferences and key things that the experts say a good care service should have. Even if you think your chosen supported living homes already tick these boxes, make sure this is really the case when you look around.

There are other things which will only become apparent once you're actually in the supported living home. Try to spend long enough there to get an idea of what life is like for the service users and observe how staff respond to them. Here are a few things you might want to think about

Atmosphere

Does this feel like a place where you could live? Consider how clean and well-kept it is, whether there are any unpleasant smells, whether you like the layout of the building and individual rooms, and how welcoming the staff are. Some of this will be very personal – what feels like home to one person might not to someone else. This is especially important to bear in mind if you're choosing for someone else.

You almost know as soon as you walk through the front door.

Service users

Consider whether the service users seem to be well looked after.

- Do they have clean clothes on?
- Are staff engaging with them or are they being left alone?
- Does it seem like they have the same sort of needs as you?
- Do you think you could socialise with them?

If possible, try to speak to people about what they think of life in this house.

Rooms

- Are the rooms a suitable size and do you like their appearance?
- Are they bright and airy, and are they a comfortable temperature?
- How much privacy will you have? Ask how much, if any, of your own furniture you'll be able to bring with you.

Activities

- Are there any activities going on that you can observe? If so, do people seem to be enjoying them and are people able to choose whether or not they take part?

Facilities and services

- Are there plenty of bathrooms within easy reach?
- Is there a quiet area as well as one with a TV, so you can read or chat if you would prefer that?
- Is there a garden and how accessible is it?

Staff

- Do the staff seem fully engaged with everyone and what they are doing?
- Do they speak directly to the people rather than over their heads?
- Do there seem to be enough staff – are people having to wait to be helped to eat or to go to the toilet, or are they usually helped immediately?
- Do the staff seem happy to work there and work well with each other?

If the council is paying some of your care fees, the council should sign a contract with the service. You should still be given a copy of the contract or the terms and conditions, and if you have any concerns, speak to the council.

To Do List

Get a care needs assessment and a financial assessment from your local social services department

Work out how much you can afford to pay if anything towards your care

Contact the local housing benefits office

Choose a preferred area

Get a list of available providers offering the type of support you need

Think about what matters to you and divide your preferences into essential and desirable

Read Care Quality Commission reports and other expert opinions

Ask family and friends for recommendations

Make a shortlist

Contact your shortlisted supported living homes for further information

Visit your shortlisted supported living homes for further information

Arrange a trial stay/introductory stay-overs

Check the contract and fees

Notes

