



Nexus Care

Annual Report

2020/21

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Background to Nexus Care

1. Nexus Care was established in 2011 as a local authority trading company (LATC) and is 100% owned by Staffordshire County Council. The company began trading in 2018 and is registered with Companies House, company number 0748276.
2. In 2017 the Council decided to develop it as a provider of care in the face of:
 - a) the need for additional reablement capacity to support the urgent care pathway and reduce delayed transfers of care;
 - b) the need for a contingency during the procurement of home care services in case insufficient independent care providers were available; and
 - c) the Council's duties to ensure and sustain the market under the Care Act 2014 and the need for a "provider of last resort".
3. Nexus Care was mobilised in January 2018 to provide reablement services. In December 2018 it took on a home care contract following the national collapse of Allied Healthcare. In 2019 and 2020 it took on Extra Care contracts when providers withdrew from the market. In the face of the Covid pandemic and the requirement for asymptomatic testing, in November 2020 Nexus Care took on the contract to provide the lateral flow device testing service across the county.
4. Nexus Care now has 244 care staff and 170 staff engaged in lateral flow device testing. Nexus Care had an annual turnover in 2020/21 of £6.238m, £2.344m (60%) greater than the previous year.

The Board

5. Nexus Care has a Board of Directors comprising of Staffordshire County Council Members and Officers, and the Chief Operating Officer, who collectively set the vision and strategy for the business and oversee operational delivery.
6. The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for the appointment of Directors. All directors present and past are registered with Company's house.
7. Nexus Care Directors at 01 April 2021 are:
 - Simon Ablewhite (Finance Director)
 - Cllr Mark Deaville
 - Dr Richard Harling
 - Clair Muldowney (Chief Operating Officer)
 - Helen Riley
 - Cllr Mark Winnington
8. All of the above have confirmed that they comply with the responsibilities of Directors as set out by Company's House and can be found by the following link:
<https://companieshouse.blog.gov.uk/2019/02/21/7-duties-of-a-company-director/>
9. The Board meet monthly and the Chief Operating Officer provides an update on all operational areas in a set format covering key aspects of the business. All meetings are minuted and actions recorded/tracked.
10. An organisational structure for Nexus Care is included in Appendix A.

Vision, values and strategy

11. The Nexus Care vision is:

To provide quality, cost effective and innovative care through a highly motivated and professional team enabling citizens to enjoy healthier, more fulfilled lives

12. Nexus Care vision has adopted the following values:

- We are ambitious, courageous and empowering.
- We support and enable our staff to make things better.
- We are open to doing things differently.
- We are bold and willing to take difficult decisions in a commercial operating context.

13. Nexus Care's strategy is:

- The focus of operations is to intervene in the care market on behalf of the Council.
- We will be available to offer a 'provider of last resort' in the event that market is unable to provide care.
- We will grow business with the Council by agreement with commissioners.
- We will operate to same 'rules' as other providers in the independent sector.
- We will seek to offer services to self-funders within the conditions of the 'Teckal' exemption
- We will operate with Staffordshire and on the borders of the county.
- Our risk appetite is "*moderate*".

Overview of services

Reablement

14. The aim of reablement is to maximise people's level of independence, often after a period of illness or stay in hospital. The service works with people to set and achieve their goals. A successful outcome is to achieve these goals, prevent hospital readmission and minimise reliance on ongoing care and support, with a target of no more than 50% requiring ongoing care and support.
15. The reablement service has a CQC registered manager and receives referrals from hospitals in East Staffordshire, Tamworth and Lichfield. The service completes the necessary risk assessments and support plans prior to care commencing. It assesses within the first 72 hours whether the client is able to complete a reablement period of up to 6 weeks, and then monitors their progress throughout. Should the individual have ongoing needs the service completes a Care Act assessment to determine their eligibility for Council funded care and support and those that are eligible are referred to the brokerage team to source it.

Home care

16. The home care service provides care and support to clients with assessed eligible needs. Home care consists of two operational branches based in Cannock and Stafford. Each branch has a CQC registered manager and teams including care co-ordinators, field care supervisors and administrators. Clients include Council funded, NHS funded, and privately funded individuals.
17. The service is on the Council's standard home care contract and works to the same terms and conditions as all other contracted providers. The branches access the Council's online portal to identify and accept new clients in the same way as other contracted providers.

Extra Care

18. The Extra Care service provides care and support at three schemes: Mill Rise, Brunel Court and School Court. People live in their own flats within the schemes and receive care and support in their own homes. The service works jointly with the housing provider.

19. Each scheme has a CQC registered care manager and team leaders. There service maintains a presence 24 hours to meet needs during day and night. Should a flat become available the service works with the housing provider to place a new resident that requires care and support.

Lateral Flow Device Testing

20. In the face of the Covid pandemic and the requirement for asymptomatic testing, in November 2020 Nexus Care established a lateral flow device testing service across the county.
21. The service offers testing at a range of sites including businesses, schools, and local community centres, alongside partnership working with leisure centres and libraries. Additionally, mobile testing was developed to offer the service in specific communities and rural areas. Staff were recruited rapidly and at the peak of testing there was 170 staff providing testing.
22. At the end of March 2021, 107,000 tests had been completed, 849 of which were positive (0.7%) from individuals that had no symptoms. Nexus Care assisted the Covid response with surge testing in areas with high case rates and in response to new variants of concern.

Annual objectives and performance

23. For 2020/21 Nexus Care set the following objectives:

- a) Provide commissioned activity
- b) Maintain and improve quality
- c) Balance the books
- d) Keep the staff happy
- e) Grow the business
- f) Help the Council to reduce costs

Provide commissioned activity

Reablement

24. In 2020/21 Nexus Care was commissioned to provide 660 hours of reablement per week on a block amount. Activity above the block hours is paid at an hourly rate as per the contract. A reconciliation is completed at the end of the year to ensure that an appropriate payment has been made. Nexus Care over delivered on the block contract averaging 870 hours of reablement per week. The service has 46 support workers.

25. 2020/21 Reablement Summary:

- 360 people started the reablement service..
- Average duration of service was 25 days, against a target of <28 days
- 62% successfully completed reablement and required no ongoing care and support, against a target of >50%
- 38% were transferred to ongoing care and support (Target <50%)
- Other reasons for the service being terminated were due to either deceased, readmission to hospital or an initial failed discharge.

Home care

26. During 2020/21 the Cannock branch provided an average of 2,200 hours per week and the Stafford branch 400 hours per week to a total of 307 clients. This is approximately 6% of all Council commissioned home care capacity. The service has 163 care workers.

Extra care

27. As of April 2021, the service was providing around 730 hours of care weekly at the three schemes to a total of 60 clients. There are 35 care workers in total.

Maintain and improve quality

28. Reablement and the Stafford home care branch have a dual CQC inspection. The most recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) rated Stafford reablement and home care as 'Good'. The CQC report is available here <https://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-4314896520>
29. Cannock home care branch has not been inspected by CQC since it was transferred from Allied Healthcare to Nexus Care. The branch currently holds an overall rating of 'Good' and is rated 'Good' in all domains. As with reablement and the Stafford home care branch, policy, processes and systems introduced recently have improved quality - for example regular internal audits, robust recruitment practices, and digital scheduling of visits.
30. The Covid pandemic has had an impact on reablement and home care services, reducing the number of care and support workers due to isolation, as well as affecting recruitment and retention. Agency staff have been used in order to maintain services, which may be a concern to the CQC on inspection.
31. The Extra Care schemes have not been inspected by CQC since they transferred to Nexus Care. Brunel Court currently holds an overall rating of 'Good' and is rated 'Good' in all domains. School Court currently holds an overall rating of 'Good' and is rated 'Good' in all domains except for 'Well Led', which is rated as 'Requires Improvement'. Mill Rise was also rated 'Good' in all areas on transfer. There are no concerns about future CQC inspections.
32. The results of the 2020/21 client and employee survey are included in Appendix B. The response rate for clients was 37% with the majority of feedback positive. The response rate for employees was 39%: 85% of these would recommend Nexus Care as a place to work, and 90% enjoy working for the company.
33. All events are logged on to a dedicated system, monitored by the operations team for key themes and trends, and discussed with branch managers monthly. Events cannot be closed until a senior manager approves that all relevant steps have been taken and they are fully resolved. A summary of events is shared at monthly Board meetings.

Balance the books

34. Annual accounts for the year 2020/21 have recently been audited by an external auditor. No concerns have been raised. These are included at the Appendix C.

Keep the staff happy

35. One of the biggest challenges in reablement and home care is recruitment and retention of staff. Home care is not a preferred career choice for several reasons including long and unsociable hours, travelling, and the level of responsibility against rates of pay. Challenges with recruitment and retention have been exacerbated by Covid, and additional measures were put in to place to maintain recruitment and training throughout the pandemic.
36. In home care Nexus Care staff turnover during 2020/21 was 38% compared to a sector average of 40%.
37. Nexus Care continues to work hard to attract new staff and retain existing staff to try and increase our workforce. Some of the methods we have introduced during 2020/21 include:
 - Improved terms and conditions – for example block pay, where staff are paid in shifts rather than task and time.
 - A digital system to optimise scheduling and reduce travelling times.
 - Perks such as discounts at hundreds of attractions and high street stores.
 - Reduced monthly cost for any car issues.
 - Digital technology allowing more time caring and reducing paperwork.
 - Improved communication methods such as online platforms.
 - Increased engagement with leadership and management team.
 - Pay evaluation method completed for back office functions in order to ensure level of pay is in line with market average.
 - Investment into policy management system which allows all colleagues access to all policies via an app.
 - Mobile phones for all staff.
 - EarlyPay – allowing staff to access funds before they have been paid.
 - Welcome and retention bonuses.
 - Welcome packs with gifts including travel mugs and trolley tokens.

38. An apprentice has been employed and is currently working towards Business and Administration level 3. Following completion a marketing role will be developed to focus on recruitment and retention of staff alongside building the brand to attract new clients and grow the business.

Grow the business

39. Nexus Care has seen significant growth in 2020/21 with additional services:
- Extra Care - activity and staff transfer from Green Square Accord at the Mill Rise scheme, Newcastle Under Lyme .
 - Lateral flow device testing service.
40. Nexus Care continues to recruit in reablement and home care in order to offer greater capacity.

Help the Council to reduce costs

41. 137 people (62%) completed reablement with no further need of ongoing care and support, potentially averting cost of around £3.5m had all of these required an ongoing home care service (based on 28 hours per week).
42. In home care Nexus Care follows the Trusted Assessor model which allows clients' care and support to be flexed up and down depending on their needs. Any requirements for increases in hours and opportunities for decreases in hours are pursued as part of routine management of the service.
43. Nexus Care assists the Council to reduce non-contracted home care by taking on these clients wherever possible. This allows proper quality assurance, gives a guarantee of continuity of care, and often reduces costs. Opportunities for this during the Covid pandemic have been limited due to the need to prioritise existing clients.

Annual accounts

44. The turnover of the business in 20/21 was £6.238m, an increase of 60% over the previous financial year. £1.684m of the increased turnover related to the LFT service which was established during the year as part of the SCC response to Covid 19. The LFT service was provided to SCC at cost.

45. A small in year trading loss was reported of £19,835, which will be funded from company reserves. This was after the company repaid to the County Council the market continuity payment it receives of £150,000 p.a. to provide resilience in the care market and to step in at short notice as a result of market failure, and take over the provision of care. Given the strong in-year trading position, this payment was not required. The company also made early repayment during the year of the outstanding loan (£120,482), it received from the Council when it first started trading to support business cashflow.

46. More detail is included in Appendix D.

Key achievements in 2020/21 and ongoing issues

Achievements

47. Nexus Care made some key achievements during 2020/21. These include:
- Maintaining good quality services during the Covid.
 - Increased capacity and improved performance in reablement.
 - Successful transfer of Extra Care services during the pandemic.
 - Establishment of a lateral flow device testing service within a very short timescale.
 - Design and implementation of a fast-track training programme to provide the Council with trained volunteers to augment care and support in the event the market could not meet the demand.

Ongoing issues

48. **Staff recruitment and retention** remains a key challenge. Nexus Care continues to explore innovative ways to recruit and retain, informed by feedback from staff themselves. Pay is a big factor but there are other issues that are important to staff such as how they are treated and how their individual circumstances can be accommodated by working patterns.
49. **Covid** presents an ongoing risk of increased demand, rising costs and staff absence. Services will need to get used to enhanced infection control measures, including the need for Personal Protective Equipment to be worn, and this may compound challenges with staff recruitment and retention.
50. **Stability in the market** will also remain a challenge for Nexus Care. As a 'Provider of Last Resort' the company is expected to be able to respond quickly if other providers fail. To date the transfer of services has been managed successfully.

Developments for 2021/22

51. Nexus Care is exploring further expansion of the business including:
- Increasing reablement activity further and potentially developing 'Step-Up Reablement' in addition to the current hospital discharge reablement service in line with the Council requirements
 - Expansion of home care into Newcastle-under-Lyme after further conversations with the Council about demand and confirmation from the housing provider that their property can be used.
 - Residential care homes.
 - Investing in engagement activity, with marketing initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of staff alongside building the brand to attract new clients and grow the business.
52. Nexus Care will continue to review and improve processes and ways of working and invest in systems that will allow the company to reach a CQC 'Outstanding' rating and establish it as an employer of choice across Staffordshire.