

Outstanding Care Analysis

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Introduction

This document details and provides a comprehensive examination of what distinguishes outstanding care services. It focuses on the practices and innovations that lead to exceptional outcomes in care services, particularly in the context of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections. The document highlights the importance of person-centred care, effective leadership, innovative practices, and thorough preparation for inspections, it also offers practical tips for care providers aiming to achieve an outstanding rating, emphasising the need for robust quality assurance systems, specialised training, and investment in resources.

The guide is aimed at a range of roles primarily within CQC regulated adult social care services including owners, directors, registered managers, nominated individuals, operational leads, quality and compliance managers, care coordinators, learning and development leads, senior care workers and supervisors.



The difference between Good and Outstanding rating?

- **Good:** Meets the required standards and provides safe, effective, and compassionate care.
- **Outstanding:** Exceeds the required standards, demonstrating innovation, creativity, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Understanding the Difference Between Good and Outstanding:

- Is the service safe?

Safe: you are protected from abuse and avoidable harm

- Is the service effective?

Effective: your care, treatment and support achieves good outcomes, helps you to maintain quality of life and is based on the best available evidence

- Is the service caring?

Caring: staff involve and treat you with compassion, kindness, dignity and respect."

- Is the service responsive to people's needs?

Responsive: services are organised so that they meet your needs."

- Is the service well-led?

Well-led: the leadership, management and governance of the organisation make sure its providing high-quality care that's based around your individual needs, that it encourages learning and innovation, and that it promotes an open and fair culture.

To evaluate a specific quality statement, CQC examine evidence in categories including people's experiences of health and care services, feedback from staff and leaders and feedback from partners, observation, and processes.

CQC will then assess the evidence collected for each quality statement and score it on a 4-point scale:

1. Evidence shows significant shortfalls
2. Evidence shows some shortfalls
3. Evidence shows a good standard
4. Evidence shows an exceptional standard

The scores for the quality statements are combined to provide a total score for the relevant key question (safe, effective, caring, responsive, and well-led). Based on the total score, a provider is given an overall quality rating of 'inadequate', 'requires improvement', 'good', or 'outstanding'.

At least 2 of the 5 key questions would normally need to be rated as outstanding and 3 key questions rated as good before an aggregated rating of outstanding can be awarded.

A common question is: 'What does Outstanding actually look like?'

The answer isn't simple, as it depends heavily on the type of service, the needs of the client group, and the unique circumstances of those receiving support. What matters most can vary significantly from one setting to another

The culture of a service or organisation is crucial, especially in how person-centred care is integrated into practice and the understanding of individual wishes and needs. Effective leadership is essential. If care and support are consistently delivered in a manner that focuses on the individual, maintains their safety, is effective and caring, and responds to their changing needs and wishes, then it is likely that each of the five key questions will be successfully evidenced, leading to a 'Good' inspection rating.

The CQC considers outstanding services to possess the following qualities:

- **Safe:** A robust safety system that emphasises openness, transparency, and learning from mistakes.
- **Effective:** Consistently better outcomes for people compared to other services, with feedback describing the service as exceptional.
- **Caring:** Individuals are respected and valued, and they are empowered both practically and emotionally as partners in their care.
- **Responsive:** Services are customised to meet individual needs, offering flexibility, choice, and continuity of care.
- **Well-led:** The governance and culture of the service are dedicated to providing high-quality, person-centred care.

To achieve an Outstanding rating, it is necessary to demonstrate practices that not only meet all the required standards but also go above and beyond to achieve the most effective outcomes. Many examples of Outstanding practice in CQC inspection reports highlight innovations introduced to address specific challenges, achievements that are extraordinary, or exemplary practices that have significantly improved the lives of individuals or groups.

An Outstanding rating reflects continued improvement in your services and better outcomes for the people that you support, you need to ensure that you maintain your services but also show how you have delivered innovation in your service to improve people's lives.

CQC inspection reports contain a wide range of examples of Outstanding practice, which can be invaluable in helping providers understand the distinction between 'Good' and 'Outstanding'. These examples highlight the breadth of what Outstanding care can look like, often tailored to specific settings or individual needs.

For service providers aiming for an Outstanding rating in their next CQC inspection, here are some tips:

1. **Be Well-Prepared:** Understand what to expect during the inspection and know the quality of your service. Robust Quality Assurance systems are essential.
2. **Meet All Standards:** Ensure all standards are met and have clear action plans for areas needing improvement.
3. **Effective Leadership:** Ensure managers are motivated, skilled, and effective leaders. Ensuring leadership is not invisible, you see it - roles, oversight and accountability.
4. **Invest in the Service:** Allocate resources for necessary adaptations and improvements. (Technology supports consistency i.e. electronic rotas, digital records) and integrate with your communities' creating partnerships, innovation and client voice. Training is key, ensure you're providing all staff with advanced training, mock inspections and quality robust audits.
5. **Learn from others:** Read Outstanding CQC reports and identify standout elements, when things go wrong you must learn and evolve.
6. **Document Outstanding Practices:** Maintain an evidence file to catalogue areas of Outstanding practice, this can serve as a reminder for staff and managers, as well as for CQC inspectors
7. **Prepare for your clients, families and staff:** If they're happy, CQC usually will be too.
8. **Build the behaviours:** If you want to become outstanding, you need to build the behaviours behind it.
9. **Consistency:** It's what you do every day and not just on inspection day, consistency is safer, clients feel more comfortable, and staff feel valued.
10. **Embedding learning and culture change:** You must have robust implementation an accountability otherwise the same issues will resurface,

foster a positive and proactive culture where staff are motivated and skilled.
Is there a positive and proactive culture where staff are motivated and skilled in delivering person-centred care?

This guide includes practical examples of how you can enhance and adapt your services, alongside real-world illustrations from other adult social care providers who have successfully contributed to achieving an Outstanding rating.





Safe

Risk enablement, safeguarding, learning, and reliability.

What CQC looks for: A strong, empowering approach to safety; openness and learning when things go wrong.

Care providers should take a person-led approach to risk management, enabling people to take a positive approach to risk where appropriate and ensuring a robust incident learning culture which includes root cause analysis. Safe staffing levels and the right mix of skills to meet the needs of people who require care and support. Delivery of safe medication and a responsive approach to any issues.

Examples

Safe Inspection Framework Examples	
<p>Safety huddles</p> <p>Introducing safety huddles weekly where staff review incidents and near misses. You should have open discussions, providing an opportunity for refresher training and improved shift handovers. This can lead to a significant reduction in errors and improved resident outcomes. This reflects a proactive learning culture and openness, key to being rated “Outstanding” under Safe.</p> 	<p>Reviewing data to reduce falls</p> <p>Introducing data-driven staffing adjustments to reduce falls. This could look at you analysing internal data to identify patterns in falls—noticing spikes during specific times and locations, then adjusting staffing rotas, accordingly, placing more staff in high-risk areas during peak times. This can reduce falls and emergency interventions, showing a commitment to continuous improvement and risk mitigation.</p> 



Digital Safeguarding and Incident Reporting System

Introducing a real-time digital safeguarding system that allows staff to log concerns instantly via tablets. This enables faster escalation and resolution of safeguarding issues, with automatic alerts to senior staff. Digital systems can also track trends, helping to prevent future incidents, this innovation supports a transparent and responsive safety culture.



Empowering Residents in Risk Management

Involving residents directly in risk enablement planning. For example, a resident who may want to continue gardening despite mobility issues can be supported with adaptive tools and supervision, this approach will balance positive risk-taking with safety, respecting autonomy while managing hazards. This aligns with CQC’s emphasis on person-led safety.



Innovative safety measures

Where appropriate, support clients who want to go out alone, allowing them to maintain autonomy while ensuring staff can locate them if needed. Each situation should be individually risk assessed, considering the person’s abilities, preferences, and any potential hazards. Before implementing any safety, technology or monitoring measures, ensure the person has given informed permission. If they lack capacity, a clearly documented best interest decision must be recorded, reflecting their wishes, rights, and least restrictive options. These approaches foster a culture of psychological safety, enabling people to feel secure, respected, and in control within their own homes while maintaining robust, person-centred risk management.



Incident Learning Culture

Ensure you carry out thorough root cause analysis following any incident to identify underlying issues and prevent recurrence; you should ensure that you share insights and lessons learned during team meetings to promote transparency and drive improvements in practice. Foster a culture of openness and continuous learning, where staff feel empowered to speak up, reflect, and evolve their approach to safety (you could look at accidents and incidents training for staff to help develop them). These actions demonstrate a proactive commitment to safety and learning, key indicators of Outstanding care.



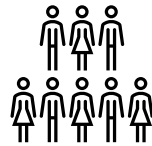
Safe Staffing and Skill Mix

Maintaining adequate staffing levels with a balanced mix of skills tailored to the specific needs of those receiving care.

Ensuring all staff are well-trained in safe medication practices and equipped to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging issues.

Taking a proactive approach to workforce planning, which supports consistent, reliable, and safe care delivery.

This approach reflects a commitment to safety, responsiveness, and continuous improvement. Key indicators of Outstanding practice under the CQC’s “Safe” domain.



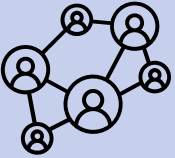
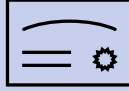
Effective

Outcomes focused, following best practice, and proactive health/well-being

What CQC looks for: Care achieves better-than-expected outcomes and uses the best available evidence.

Care providers ensure thorough initial and ongoing assessments of individuals care, focusing on evidence-based care plans with measurable outcomes.

Examples

Effective Inspection Framework Examples	
<p>Partnership working</p> <p>Staff are committed to achieving better outcomes for people, this includes working collaboratively with external stakeholders, such as GP's and speech and language therapists to ensure continuity and integration.</p> 	<p>Highly skilled, motivated and confident workforce.</p> <p>A highly skilled, motivated, and confident workforce is the cornerstone of delivering outstanding care. When staff are well-trained and empowered, they consistently apply best practices, adapt to individual needs, and proactively seek better outcomes for those they support. Their confidence will foster trust, their motivation will drive innovation, and their expertise will ensure care is not only safe and effective but also deeply personalised. This combination leads to a culture of excellence where continuous improvement is embedded, ultimately meeting and exceeding the standards required for an Outstanding rating under the Effective domain.</p> 

Involving clients in decision making with communication difficulties.

Tailored person-centred approaches to ensure individuals with communication challenges are actively involved in decisions about their care.

This could include the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools such as picture boards, symbol systems (e.g., Makaton or PECS), speech-generating devices, or tablet-based apps to facilitate expression of preferences. One-to-one support sessions where staff take time to understand non-verbal cues, body language, and behavioural indicators that reflect choices or discomfort.

Involving family members or advocates who know the individual well to interpret communication styles and support decision-making.

Creating personalised communication profiles for everyone, detailing preferred methods, triggers, and responses, which are shared across the care team.

Training staff in specialist communication techniques, such as intensive interaction or sensory-based engagement, to build trust and understanding.



Outcome-focused care planning

Setting up each client with measurable goals, such as regaining mobility or improving nutrition, with progress tracked over time.

Developing bespoke cognitive stimulation programmes for clients with early-stage dementia, helping to slow cognitive decline.



Nutrition and Hydration training

Ensuring staff have all had nutrition and hydration training which can result in clients having improved weight stability among those at risk of malnutrition.

Staff can then proactively support individuals who may be vulnerable to malnutrition or dehydration by recognising early signs, monitoring intake and outcomes, collaborating with dieticians and healthcare professionals, educating residents and families.

This approach not only improves physical health outcomes such as stabilising weight among at risk individuals but also enhances dignity, independence, and quality of life.



Working with the local community

Outstanding care providers actively build strong relationships with local organisations, such as churches, charities, and community centres, to foster inclusion and wellbeing among residents. These partnerships go beyond occasional visits; they are embedded into the culture of the service and contribute to a sense of belonging and purpose.

You could look at collaborating with local churches to offer regular pastoral visits, spiritual support, and inclusive events that reflect residents' faith and values.

You could invite local volunteers to participate in activities, share skills, or simply spend time with residents will help create intergenerational connections.

Look at hosting community engagement groups, such as quiz nights, coffee mornings, or seasonal celebrations, which encourage social interaction and reduce isolation.

Creating resident-led initiatives, where individuals help plan or host events, giving them a sense of ownership and pride.



Capture Positive Changes

Ensure you capture positive changes in residents’ lives, both big and small. Discuss those at team meetings, making sure you keep a record of good news stories. That way when you need to evidence the support provided, and the impact this has had for the people you support, you will then have it readily available to show the inspector.



Tailored meal plans

Tailor meal plans to accommodate individuals’ cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and specific health requirements.

Example (Resident Profile)

Cultural background: South Asian

Religious beliefs: Hindu (vegetarian, avoids beef)

Health needs: Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure

Tailored Meal Plan Example:

Breakfast - Masala oats with low-fat milk, a small portion of fresh papaya, and herbal tea (no sugar)

Lunch - Lentil dal (low salt), brown rice, sautéed spinach with garlic, cucumber raita (low-fat yogurt)

Snack - Roasted chickpeas or a small banana with unsweetened almond milk

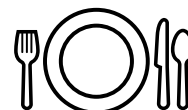
Dinner - Mixed vegetable curry (no potatoes), whole wheat chapati, and a side salad with lemon dressing

All meals are vegetarian, low in sodium and sugar, and portion-controlled to manage blood glucose levels. No beef or eggs included.

Cultural familiarity (e.g., traditional South Asian dishes),

Religious observance (vegetarian, no beef),

Health-conscious choices (low sugar, low salt, diabetic-friendly).



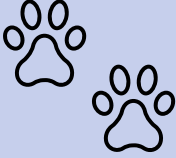



Caring

Compassion, dignity, and relationship-centred support

What CQC looks for: People feel respected, valued, and empowered as partners; caring practice is “exceptional and distinctive.”

Care providers deliver consistent, continuity-focused staffing, who focus on delivery of care and support that puts the individual at the heart of everything.

Examples

Caring Inspection Framework Examples	
<p>Pet Therapy (supporting anxiety)</p> <p>Introducing pet therapy animals which act as a buddy for when new clients move in or clients are feeling anxious, improved confidence for the client. Interacting with animals can bring joy and comfort. Pet therapy sessions with trained animals can be particularly beneficial for emotional well-being</p> 	<p>Innovative Adaptations</p> <p>Introducing adaptations to assist clients to retain independence, clients with limited mobility and visual impairment can be supported to use a voice-controlled computer speaker, allowing them to call family and schedule appointments through voice commands.</p> 
<p>Emotional Support</p> <p>Train staff in emotional intelligence and bereavement support. Example: a care worker regularly visited a resident’s spouse in hospital to keep them connected and to support with maintaining their connection, this supports and demonstrates compassionate, relationship centred care that goes above the expectation.</p> 	<p>Learning Life Stories</p> <p>Staff took time to learn life stories of residents to tailor interactions and activities. Example: One provider created memory boxes and life journals for people with dementia, helping staff connect meaningfully. Daily routines were adapted to individual preferences, such as waking times, meals, and hobbies.</p> 

Caring Inspection Framework Examples

Celebrating Individual Achievements

Introducing and recognising/celebrating residents’ milestones, hobbies, and contributions, this can help to boost self-esteem and create a sense of purpose.

Ensuring that every staff member has the client’s birthday saved into the rota system, this small gesture makes clients feel valued, build stronger relationships.



Empowering Residents in Decision-Making

Actively involve residents in care planning by including residents in periodic reviews of their care plans, allowing them to voice preferences, suggest changes, and reflect on progress.

Actively involve residents with community roles including welcoming new residents, this could include giving tours, sharing their experiences, and helping newcomers settle in. It builds community and gives existing residents a sense of purpose, this approach fosters a sense of ownership, dignity, and inclusion, and contributes to improved emotional wellbeing and satisfaction.

Establish groups where residents can contribute to decisions about meals, activities, or home improvements. This promotes autonomy and democratic participation and will help to give you an improved service quality.

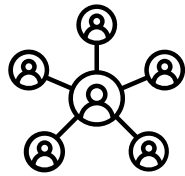


Caring Inspection Framework Examples

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

Providing staff members with access to a minority and ethnicity file which contains detailed information about a wide range of religious and cultural beliefs and traditions.

This will help care staff to understand diet and food preparation, personal care needs, language and communication, death and dying, this will help to support people's religious beliefs and practice.





Responsive

Personalisation, choice, continuity, and community connection

What CQC looks for: Services that are tailored, flexible, and accessible, with active involvement of people and communities in planning and feedback.

Care providers co-design of support plans; positive risk-taking to enable life goals; lively community links that create purpose and belonging.

Examples

Responsive Inspection Framework Examples	
<p>Independence for the client</p> <p>Giving clients a responsibility and task to complete can give clients a sense of purpose and meaning and can make them feel valued and needed, which is essential for their self-esteem and mental health.</p> <p>Having regular responsibilities can provide clients with a sense of routine and structure. This can be particularly comforting and beneficial for those with cognitive impairments.</p> <p>Successfully fulfilling a responsibility can boost a client's confidence and self-worth. It can give them a sense of accomplishment and pride in their abilities.</p> <p>An example of giving a client a task can include:</p>	
<p>Managing an onsite café</p> <p>Create an onsite café with staff support including training and specialist equipment, a name badge, and a uniform. As a result, the individual can become much happier and regain their confidence.</p> 	<p>Welcoming new residents</p> <p>Clients can be given the task of welcoming new residents, showing them around, and helping them settle in. This can foster a sense of community and belonging.</p> 

Meal Preparation

Involving clients in simple meal preparation tasks, such as setting the table and peeling vegetables can make them feel useful and engaged.



Activities

Offering numerous activities to keep people engaged and stimulated, with a focus on ensuring your clients lead fulfilling lives.

These activities not only provide enjoyment but also promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being

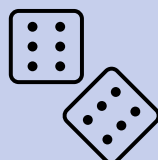
**Ensure you take photographs throughout the activities (ensuring permission is granted and capacity is considered) add these around the home to show the range of activities, events and celebrations that have taken place throughout the year. **

Organising events including:

Bingo nights

Bingo is a group activity that encourages interaction among residents, helping to build friendships and reduce feelings of isolation. It fosters a sense of community and belonging, which is essential for emotional wellbeing.

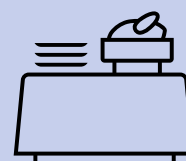
Bingo can be easily adapted to suit different abilities, including large-print cards or themed versions that reflect residents’ interests or cultural backgrounds.



Themed takeaway nights

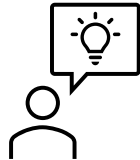
Introducing different themes and cuisines can break the monotony of daily routines and bring excitement. Trying new foods and experiencing different cultures can be a delightful adventure. A themed night can transform a regular meal into a special event.

The ambiance, decorations, and themed menus can make the dining experience more enjoyable and memorable. For many, takeaway nights are a common and enjoyable part of life but bringing this experience into a care setting can help clients feel more connected to their past routines and the outside world.



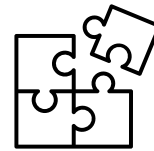
Quiz nights

Participating in quizzes can help keep the mind active and engaged, the experience can boost mood and overall happiness, and quiz nights can provide an opportunity for clients to interact with each other, fostering a sense of community and reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation.



Games and puzzles

Board games, card games, and puzzles can be great for mental stimulation and social interaction. They can also be adapted to suit different levels of ability.



Music therapy

Listening to music, singing or even playing musical instruments can evoke memories, improve mood, and provide a sense of accomplishment



Gardening

Whether it's tending to indoor plants or working in a garden, this activity can be very rewarding. It provides physical exercise and a connection to nature.



Arts and Crafts

Activities like painting, knitting, and pottery can be both relaxing and stimulating. They allow residents to express their creativity and improve their fine motor skills.



Cooking and Baking

Preparing simple recipes can be a fun and rewarding activity. It can also be a great way to reminisce about favourite foods and share stories with other residents and staff.



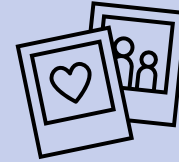
Reading and Storytelling

Reading books, newspapers, or poetry can be a relaxing activity. Storytelling sessions, where residents share their own stories, can also be very engaging.



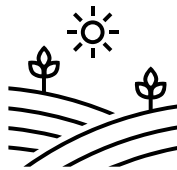
Therapy

Using photos, music, or objects from the past to stimulate memories and conversation can be very meaningful. This can help residents feel connected to their personal history.



Outings and trips

Short trips to local parks, museums, or cafes can provide a change of scenery and new experiences. These outings can be tailored to the interests and abilities of the residents.



Technology-based Activities

Using tablets or computers for activities like video calls with family, playing interactive games, or exploring virtual tours can be both fun and stimulating.



Exercise

Exercise can be particularly beneficial for cognitive health, this social engagement can help build friendships and create a sense of community, this activity can also bring a sense of achievement, giving clients a sense of accomplishment and boost their self-esteem.



Well-led

Values-driven leadership, learning culture, and robust governance

Care providers deliver positive leadership, management and governance that assures high-quality, person-centred care, promotes innovation, and sustains an open, fair culture.

Examples

Well- Led Inspection Framework Examples	
<p>Supervision</p> <p>To become an outstanding care provider, certain supervision skills are essential.</p> <p>Effective supervision is not just about monitoring performance, it's about developing people, improving practice, and ensuring quality outcomes for those receiving care.</p> <p>You should ensure you conduct regular structured supervisions, set goals and development planning, provide supportive coaching and mentoring, ensure you use effective supervision records to help track progress, identify patterns, inform training and improve the service needs.</p> <p>These skills ensure that the care provided is of the highest quality and meets the needs of clients effectively.</p> 	<p>Training</p> <p>Ensuring staff receive training to maintain high-quality standards of care but to also provide specialised training to enhance understanding of certain conditions.</p> <p>Outstanding care providers invest in the continuous training and development of their staff.</p> <p>You should ensure that your team is knowledgeable, skilled, and up to date with the latest best practices in care.</p> <p>Access FREE advanced training</p> 

Champions

Innovative staff training methods, such as having a ‘Champions’.
 Champions act as communication bridges between leadership and staff, feeding back challenges and ideas.
 This two-way dialogue helps organisations adapt quickly, improve services, and maintain compliance.

Wellbeing Champions

Act as advocates for staff health and wellbeing, sharing resources, promoting training, and signposting to support services. A strong wellbeing network can also enhance retention and engagement across care settings.



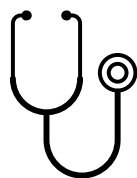
Dignity Champions

Promote dignity and respect in all aspects of care, ensuring person-centred approaches are embedded in daily practice, the champions will help to enhance quality of life for service users, supports compliance with CQC standards, and builds trust with families. Recognition schemes (e.g., Dignity in Care Awards) can further motivate staff.



Clinical or Specialist Champions

Lead on specific areas such as infection control, dementia care, or safeguarding, providing expertise and mentoring, this improves adherence to best practice, reduces risks (e.g., infection outbreaks), and ensures continuous professional development within teams.


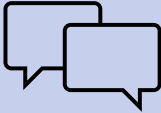



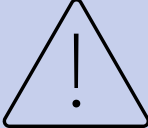


Digital Champions

Support colleagues in adopting digital tools, improving confidence and skills in using technology for care delivery and communication which increases efficiency, reduces errors, and enables better data sharing and remote care options.

Digital champions also help bridge the digital skills gap within your teams.

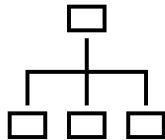


<p>Community or Engagement Champions</p> <p>Act as connectors between care settings and the wider community, promoting health initiatives and social inclusion, this reduces isolation for service users, strengthens community ties, and supports holistic wellbeing.</p> 	<p>Communication and Feedback</p> <p>Outstanding care providers communicate clearly and empathetically with clients, families, and staff. They listen actively, provide clear instructions, and ensure that everyone is informed and involved in the care process.</p> <p>Involving clients and their families in the care planning process, ensuring that their voices are heard and their wishes are respected.</p> 
<p>Empathy and Compassion</p> <p>They show genuine care and concern for their clients' well-being. They understand the emotional and physical needs of their clients and provide support with kindness and respect.</p> 	<p>Recognition and Rewards</p> <p>Recognising and rewarding staff for their hard work and dedication, fostering a positive and motivated team.</p> 
<p>Problem-Solving and Decision-Making</p> <p>Outstanding care providers are adept at identifying issues and finding effective solutions. They make informed decisions quickly and confidently, ensuring that the care provided is safe and efficient.</p> 	<p>Crisis Management</p> <p>They are prepared to handle emergencies and crises calmly and effectively. They have clear protocols in place and ensure that their team is trained to respond appropriately.</p> 



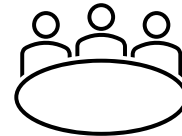
Leadership and Team Management

Management should lead by example, inspiring and motivating their team. They delegate tasks appropriately, provide support and guidance, and foster a positive and collaborative work environment.



Regular Staff Meetings

Implement **regular, structured staff meetings** as a core part of their governance and communication strategy. These meetings serve multiple purposes.



Monitoring and Evaluation

To consistently deliver Outstanding care, you should implement a robust system for monitoring and evaluating service quality.

This involves conducting regular reviews to ensure care remains person-centred, safe, and effective, and is aligned with best practice standards.

Providers should:

Systematically gather feedback from clients, families, and staff to gain insight into lived experiences and identify areas for improvement.

Utilise data from quality assurance audits, including incident reports, performance metrics, and service evaluations, to inform decision-making and strategic planning.

Translate findings into actionable improvements, ensuring that lessons learned are embedded into practice and contribute to a culture of continuous development.

This proactive and reflective approach not only maintains high standards but also drives innovation and excellence key characteristics of services rated as Outstanding by the CQC.



Feedback

Gathering feedback from residents and their relatives is a vital component of achieving an Outstanding rating under the Effective domain of the CQC assessment framework, feedback provides direct insight into how well care meets individual needs, supports outcomes, and respects personal preferences. It helps providers identify what is working well and where improvements are needed, fostering a culture of continuous learning and person-centred care.

You should implement structured and inclusive feedback mechanisms such as regular surveys, suggestion boxes, family forums, and one-to-one discussions. Feedback should be actively sought, documented, and used to inform care planning and service development. For example, staff can encourage residents and families to share their views during care reviews or community meetings, and then visibly act on that input to improve services. This not only demonstrates responsiveness but also builds trust and partnership, which are key indicators of Outstanding care.



Staffordshire Dignity in Care Awards

Outstanding care providers in Staffordshire demonstrate strong, values-driven leadership by actively recognising and celebrating the achievements of their staff. One powerful way they do this is by nominating staff members for the Staffordshire Dignity in Care Awards, a local initiative ran by Staffordshire County Council that highlights exceptional commitment to dignity, respect, and person-centred practice. By putting forward staff for these awards, well-led services show that they value their workforce, promote a culture of openness, and encourage continuous professional development. This recognition not only boosts morale but also reflects a leadership approach that is supportive, transparent, and invested in celebrating excellence. Such nominations clearly demonstrate to CQC that the service has an empowering leadership culture where outstanding practice is identified, shared, and rewarded.



Staffordshire care providers insights

We engaged with several outstanding care providers across Staffordshire to gather insights into the practices and approaches that contributed to their outstanding ratings. By sharing their experiences and recommendations, we aim to support other providers in understanding what it takes to consistently deliver high-quality, person-centred care and exceed regulatory expectations.

Providers consistently emphasised that achieving an Outstanding rating is rooted in a strong commitment to **openness, transparency**, and a positive organisational **culture**. They highlighted the importance of being **receptive** to new ideas and continuously **developing** staff skills. Central to their success was the consistent delivery of **person-centred care** across all aspects of individuals lives, underpinned by **effective communication** with families and professionals. **A safe, well-led** environment and a highly **trained workforce** were also seen as essential foundations for delivering exceptional care.

One provider shared a powerful example of outstanding care in action: A gentleman entered the service weighing 32 stone. Through dedicated support focused on improving his diet and lifestyle, he reduced his weight to under 15 stone and now volunteers alongside the handyman, enjoying significantly improved health and wellbeing. Staff members also joined him on his journey, achieving their own health goals. Demonstrating deep commitment, staff came in on their day off to celebrate the service's 10-year anniversary and witness five supported individuals receive awards for outstanding volunteer contributions.

One Staffordshire care provider suggested that more services could achieve Outstanding ratings by actively participating in local support networks such as the Skills for Care/Staffordshire Registered Managers Network and the Managers Quality Networking Forum. These forums offer valuable opportunities for updates, peer support, and learning from recent CQC reports. They also recommended reaching out to Skills for Care for guidance and encouraging struggling providers to attend these meetings, noting that the role of a manager can often feel isolating without such support.

Another provider highlighted the importance of strong, collaborative relationships with healthcare professionals involved in each service user's life. They emphasised that a robust support network around the manager particularly from regional and operational teams is vital to delivering consistently high-quality care.



What technology are providers using?

Adult social care providers are increasingly leveraging digital technology to enhance the quality and efficiency of their services. Here are some key technologies that are making a significant impact:

1. **Digital Care Records:** The adoption of digital social care records (DSCRs) has doubled in the past four years. These systems allow for real-time updates to care plans, ensuring that all care workers have access to the most accurate information about a person's health, preferences, and needs. This leads to more personalised and consistent care.
2. **Remote Monitoring:** Technologies such as wearables and smart home devices help monitor an individual's health conditions, track vital signs, and detect falls or other emergencies. This allows for timely interventions and enhances the safety and independence of individuals receiving care.
3. **Communication Tools:** Secure messaging apps and video calls enable care workers to communicate more easily with family members, healthcare professionals, and other staff members. This ensures better coordination and faster responses to people's needs.
4. **Training and Development Platforms:** Digital platforms provide Adult Social Care staff with ongoing access to training and learning resources. This helps them stay up to date with best practices and regulations, ultimately improving the standard of care.
5. **Assistive Technologies:** Digital tools and apps empower individuals receiving care to manage certain aspects of their daily routines more independently. This boosts their autonomy and quality of life.
6. **AI and Data Analytics:** The integration of AI and data analytics is changing the perspective of what 'good' looks like in social care. These technologies enable a shift from reactive to proactive care, allowing providers to anticipate and address issues before they become crises.

Preparing for a CQC inspection

Achieving a successful outcome in a Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection requires thorough preparation, a clear understanding of expectations, and a proactive approach to quality assurance. Below are key actions to help care providers prepare effectively:

- **Review the five key questions**
Familiarise yourself with the quality statements under each domain and gather evidence that demonstrates how your service meets or exceeds these standards.
- **Conduct internal audits and quality assurance checks.**
Regular audits help identify areas for improvement and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. Use mock inspections and peer reviews to simulate the inspection process and address any gaps in practice or documentation. Local Authority quality assurance visits can help to identify areas of improvement.
- **Ensure all documentation is up-to-date and accessible.**
Inspectors will expect to see accurate, current records that reflect the care provided. This includes care plans, risk assessments, training records, incident logs, and governance documentation. Digital systems can support real-time updates and improve accessibility.
- **Train staff on what to expect during the inspection.**
Staff should be confident in discussing their roles, responsibilities, and how they contribute to delivering person-centred care. Provide training on the inspection process, including how to respond to questions, showcase good practice, and demonstrate understanding of the service's values and policies.
- **Engage with service users, families and stakeholders.**
Prepare those receiving care and their families by informing them about the inspection and encouraging them to share feedback. Positive testimonials and active involvement can significantly influence inspection outcomes.
- **Maintain a culture of continuous improvement.**
Embed learning from past inspections, incidents, and feedback into everyday practice. Demonstrate how your service evolves in response to challenges and how improvements are sustained over time.
- **Create evidence of outstanding practice.**
Keep a well-organised portfolio that highlights examples of innovation, person-centred care, and exceptional outcomes. This can be a valuable resource during inspections and a tool for staff development.

The importance of documenting and showcasing Outstanding practice.

Documenting and recording outstanding activity is essential for demonstrating the true impact that high-quality care has on the people who receive it. While exceptional practice happens every day in care settings, it can easily be overlooked if it is not captured, shared, and celebrated. Recording these moments ensures that both the journey and the outcomes are visible not only to CQC inspectors, but also to residents, families, visitors, and staff.

Outstanding care providers make a conscious effort to evidence the difference their actions make. This involves showing not just **what** was done, but **why it mattered** and **how it improved someone's life**. When inspectors assess whether a service is "Good" or "Outstanding", they base their judgement heavily on real-world examples, tangible outcomes, and the lived experiences of people. Clear documentation helps bring these stories to life.

Why Documentation Matters

- **Shows the impact on people's lives**
Capturing outcomes such as increased confidence, reduced anxiety, improved independence, or enhanced wellbeing provides concrete evidence of personalised, effective care.
- **Provides a consistent, visual record of achievements**
Staff, residents, and families may forget day-to-day improvements. Recording them ensures nothing is lost when it comes to demonstrating progress and success.
- **Supports a positive culture of learning and pride**
Showcasing achievements boosts morale and encourages staff to continue innovating and going above and beyond.
- **Strengthens CQC inspection readiness**
Inspectors often appreciate being able to see the impact of care in action. Displayed outcomes help reinforce verbal accounts and written documentation.

Ways to Record and Display Outstanding Activity

Notice boards and photo displays

Creating a centralised notice board or "Outstanding Wall" is an effective way to celebrate achievements. This could include:

- Before-and-after examples of positive outcomes

- Photographs of activities, events, and community engagement (with consent)
- Quotes from residents and families (with consent)
- Evidence of skills development, independence, and wellbeing improvements

These visual displays help visitors and the CQC quickly understand the culture, values, and impact of the service.

Activity books, scrapbooks, or digital slideshows

Collecting photos, stories, and personal achievements in a physical or digital format provides a rich, narrative-style account of how the service supports people to thrive. This becomes particularly useful during inspections as it offers clear, accessible evidence of meaningful engagement and outcomes.

Daily logs and evidence files

Staff can maintain simple, structured logs that capture “impact moments”, ensuring no important achievements get lost. These can be collated into an evidence file that showcases outstanding practice.

Conclusion

Achieving an Outstanding rating requires dedication, innovation, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Outstanding isn't about perfection, it's about learning when things go wrong, demonstrating resilience, acting on feedback and continuing to embed improvements into everyday practice, all providers will face challenges at times but it's about not the challenges and turning them into strengths.

Outstanding care is characterised by consistency, compassion, and a proactive approach to quality.

Providers must go beyond meeting standards by fostering a person-centred culture, empowering staff, and creating environments where individuals feel safe, respected, and valued.

This guide offers practical strategies, real-world examples, and insights from Staffordshire outstanding providers to support others on their journey towards excellence. By embracing these principles and remaining open to learning and adaptation, adult social care services can not only meet regulatory expectations but truly transform lives through exceptional care and strive for excellence.

