

Enter & View Report Walker Grange

June 2026



Introduction

Healthwatch Sandwell (HWS) is the independent voice of the public in health and social care in Sandwell. We collect feedback from the public in Sandwell about their experiences of using health and social care services and use that feedback to work with service providers and commissioners to find ways to improve services.

What is Enter & View

Part of HWS remit is to carry out Enter and View visits. HWS Authorised Representatives (AR) will conduct 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 (2012) allow 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, opticians, optometrist, 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 that we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand. Healthwatch Sandwell Enter and View visits are not specifically intended to identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch Sandwell Safeguarding Policy, the service manager will be informed, and the visit will end. The Local Authority Safeguarding Team will also be informed.

We will engage with residents, tenants, family/friends, and staff who provide care. We will seek to find out about:

- Healthy Environment – The right to live in surroundings that support health and wellbeing.
- Essential Services – Access to high-quality preventative, treatment, and care services to avoid crisis.
- Access – Equal access to services without discrimination, tailored to individual and family needs.
- Safe, Dignified, Quality Services – Services that are safe, confidential, and delivered with dignity and respect.
- Information and Education – Clear, accurate information and education to support informed decisions and self-care.
- Choice – The right to choose from a range of high-quality services and providers.
- Being Listened To – The right to have concerns and views heard and acted upon.
- Being involved – To be treated as an equal partner in determining my own health and wellbeing. I want the right to be involved in

decisions that affect my life and those affecting services in my local community.



HWS will produce a report of the visit. The report will be shared with providers, regulators, the local authority, and NHS commissioners and quality assurers, the public, Healthwatch England and any other relevant partners based on what was found during the visits. They will be published on all our social media platforms.

On this occasion we have conducted an Enter & View visit to **Walker Grange in Tipton.**

Walker Grange

Walker Grange is a Sandwell local authority extra care facility, based in Tipton that provides accommodation and on-site support for individuals who require assisted living while maintaining a level of independence. People who live at Walker Grange are council tenants. The service plays a significant role within the community, offering a supportive and structured environment for the people who live at Walker Grange. Several years ago, the service was due to close; however, following strong opposition and protests from the people who live at Walker Grange and their families, who highlighted the importance of the facility and the impact its closure would have, the decision was reconsidered. As a result, Walker Grange remained open and continues to deliver care and support to those who live there.

There are 40 flats in total, and currently the vacant flats are being refurbished to improve accessibility.

CQC report **GOOD** January 2020, reviewed July 2023.

The report

This report outlines the observations and insights gathered during the **Enter and View visit carried out on 1st June 2026.** The findings reflect the views and experiences of those who chose to share their feedback during the visit and may not represent the perspectives of everyone within the service. It is hoped that the recommendations included will support the ongoing development of the service and help enhance outcomes for individuals who use it.

It should be noted that observations and insights were obtained solely from communal areas. Our scope of work does not include access to, or assessment of, individuals' private accommodation within the facility.

HWS Authorised Representatives (AR) conducted the visit:

Methodology

During the visit ARs engaged in conversations with people who live at Walker Grange, their relatives and staff members using a structured set of questions, these focused on two key areas.



Peoples Experience

Including feedback on care provided by staff, accessibility of the building, availability of information, and suggestions for service improvement.



Staff Responsiveness to Individual Needs

Exploring how staff address communication needs of service users with impairments, manage anti-social behaviour from service users or relatives, support individuals wishing to raise concerns or complaints, and gather suggestions for enhancing service delivery.

In addition to these discussions, representatives carried out environmental observations both internally and externally. These included assessments of:

- Signage
- Accessibility
- Lighting
- Refreshments
- Cleanliness
- Parking and transport options

Participation was entirely voluntary, and the team respected the wishes of those who chose not to engage.

Summary

Walker Grange is owned by Sandwell Council and opened in 1992. On the day of our visit, the registered manager was Diane Cox, who is currently covering the role while the usual manager is working elsewhere.

We were informed that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Walker Grange had been identified for closure, although the reasons for this decision were not known.

On the day of our visit, **it was clear to see how hardworking the staff at Walker Grange are.** The registered manager has many years of experience in this field, and her knowledge and expertise are effectively shared with her team, who are dedicated and consistently give their best in their roles.

All staff were observed to be **kind, compassionate, and respectful, consistently demonstrating empathy in their interactions with the people who live at Walker Grange.**

For example, staff were seen speaking to the people who live at Walker Grange in a calm and reassuring manner, taking time to listen to their concerns, and responding to individual needs with patience.

They also supported the people who live at Walker Grange with **dignity and encouraged independence where possible and engaged in friendly conversations to promote wellbeing and social interaction.**

While the building and grounds are functional, they appear dated in places and would benefit from refurbishment to improve their overall appearance and condition, as reflected in the observations detailed in the narrative below.

Premises

Walker Grange is situated in a residential area and **benefits from a spacious frontage, including trees, ample parking, and convenient access to the building.** A large Walker Grange sign is clearly visible; however, it still displays the Healthwatch Sandwell signage beneath it which should be removed as they are no longer based at this location. A minibus was observed parked in the car park.

Access to the building is via large, electronically controlled glass sliding doors, which open directly into the reception area. **Upon arrival, the Registered Manager promptly asked us to sign in using a digital tablet.**

The reception area was spacious and clean. However, the décor consisted of mismatched wall colours, which created an uncoordinated appearance and reduced the overall homely feel. A wall-mounted defibrillator was observed. From reception, there was access to the dining room, communal lounge, and corridors leading to accommodation areas. Reception staff were positioned behind a large glass frontage, allowing clear visibility of individuals entering the building.

We accessed the garden area through a fire exit door, which was neither wheelchair accessible nor easy to operate for individuals with mobility aids.



I opened the door to assist a tenant who was using two walking sticks, as he was struggling to maintain his balance while trying to push the door open. The door was heavy and awkward to manoeuvre, making it particularly difficult for him to manage independently.

The garden and patio area were spacious, featuring a small pond seating areas, and a variety of trees, shrubs, and ornaments. A designated smoking area was also present. However, the overall condition of the outdoor space requires tidying and cleaning. Uneven paving slabs were identified, and garden tools were left scattered around. As a result, the environment did not feel particularly inviting or comfortable for tenants.

The communal lounge contained a mismatched assortment of chairs and tables, lacking a cohesive style. The décor was visually unappealing and in need of repainting. Flooring consisted of a mix of carpet and vinyl, both of which appeared worn and shabby in places. **The room benefitted from ample natural light**, but we were informed that the windows are single glazed, which is unlikely to be energy efficient and may result in drafts during colder months.

Trailing wires from electrical appliances were observed along carpet edges and windowsills, presenting a potential hazard. A makeshift hot drinks station was also noted in the lounge, set up on a table with a small fridge alongside it.

In one corner of the lounge, there was an old-style wooden bar, previously used for serving refreshments. It was in a poor condition and currently being used for general storage of miscellaneous items.

A tenant shared:

“Living here is ok; I am getting familiar with the flat. Not happy to be here but it is the best option as my daughter works.”

Continuing the walkaround, the laundry room was observed. One of the machines was out of order, and several wall tiles were missing, having been removed and left piled on a nearby ledge. The contract flooring was also observed to be lifting away from the wall.

The communal toilets were observed to be in a similar condition to the laundry room, appearing outdated and in need of repair, refitting, and redecoration. Several tiles had fallen off the wall and had not been replaced. The waste bin was full, indicating poor maintenance.

There are no doorbells or cameras installed in the corridors. Fire alarm testing is conducted at weekends. A review of the fire safety equipment showed that it had been recently checked and appropriately dated.

The people who live at Walker Grange are provided with personal alarms, worn either around the neck or on the wrist, and the manager confirmed that all bathrooms are equipped with alarm systems, which is a positive safety feature.

tenants were observed wearing their personal alarms.

Staff interaction & quality of care

Choice

The manager explained that Walker Grange comprises of self-contained flats equipped with cooking facilities, allowing many tenants to prepare their own meals. Therefore, no direct observations of personal accommodation were undertaken during the visit.

For those who prefer not to cook, the dining room offers a daily selection of both hot and cold meal options. These meals are available at an additional cost.

Some tenants shared:

"I can't cook so I get help in preparing food. I used to eat in the communal area at lunchtime, but the food was too much. Now I eat in my room with the help of my carer"

"I don't cook so I eat in the dining room, food is good."

"I cook my own meals, well, the ready meals that my family bring in for me, occasionally I will eat in the dining room or go to the local pub."

The people who live at Walker Grange appeared to **maintain a good level of autonomy and independence in their daily lives. Feedback from both staff and tenants indicated that individuals are supported and encouraged to make their own choices regarding their routines.**

This includes decisions about when to get up, when and where to eat, and how they choose to spend their time each day.

Tenants shared:

"I get up when I want to, carers come and help me with bathing and getting dressed, they also help me with my food and medications."

"I go out to do my own shopping alone when I want, I catch the bus or get a taxi."

"I do my own thing; I can do most things for myself but have support if needed."

"I go shopping, usually with a family member."

Other tenants shared:

"It's ok here, easy to move around in my wheelchair, I do my own thing, what's not to like or dislike. My family couldn't look after me."

"I didn't get a choice of where I wanted to live, it's ok here though."

"I believe the staff do the best they can, I wear my alarm on my wrist, I feel the care is good."

On the day of our visit, only a limited number of care staff were present in the communal areas, as most were attending to tenants within their own flats. **The staff who were observed demonstrated genuine compassion and empathy; they engaged in friendly conversation, sharing laughter and humour, while consistently maintaining respect.**

A carer shared:

"I love my job, I have been a carer for years and I enjoy helping people. The communal areas aren't the best here though."



All people who live at Walker Grange are free to choose whether they wish to take part in the weekly activity schedule organised by staff. An activity board is displayed, outlining a range of options such as weekly arts and crafts sessions where materials are paid for by tenants. Bingo was also on offer.

A tenant shared:

"I try to take part but as I can't see, I don't join in when they play bingo. I can't do arts and crafts."

Another tenant shared:

"We sometimes have a singer, which is nice to listen to."

The manager acknowledged that there is a need to improve opportunities for tenants to access the community and to make fuller use of the available minibus.

These outings would provide all tenants with the opportunity and choice to spend time outside of the home environment, promoting social inclusion, independence, and overall wellbeing.

Information & Education

The reception area served as a central point for all notice boards, displaying key information such as the 2020 CQC certificate, Health and Safety documentation, and other required regulatory notices.

A tenants information board was displayed, showing scheduled meeting dates along with minutes from previous meetings. It also included details of an upcoming Welfare Rights meeting.

However, the board appeared cluttered and would benefit from being organised and clearly presented.

A member of staff shared:

“Tenants meetings are held monthly and can occasionally become quite lively, with tenants expressing their views in a vocal manner.”

Another notice board observed was a staff photo board, displaying images of the team members who work at Walker Grange.

There was also a notice board displaying the Sandwell Customer Feedback Guide, alongside a letter from Healthwatch Sandwell regarding our planned Enter and View visit to Walker Grange.

Staffing

We were informed that staffing levels are higher in the mornings and are reduced in the afternoons, as reflected in the shift rota, with two staff members on duty overnight. All staff are **trained in first aid and have completed their mandatory training requirements. E-learning is ongoing, with occasional face-to-face training sessions also provided.**

All staff attend team meetings when they are on shift and receive regular supervision.

Some of the people who live at Walker Grange require 24-hour care, which was evidenced during the visit by the presence of a **staff member providing continuous support.** Management and staff work across a range of contracts, including full-time, part-time, and job share arrangements.

The communal areas at Walker Grange are maintained and kept clean by council staff. Tenants have the option to arrange and pay for cleaning of their own flats, although some care staff may provide support with cleaning where needed.

Some tenants with good mobility can clean their flats independently.

The manager advised that when district nurses visit tenants, these visits are carried out within the individual's flat.

There is no treatment room available at Walker Grange.

We were informed that management and staff can support in arranging GP or dental appointments where required; however, in most cases tenants or their family members organise these appointments themselves.

Some tenants shared:

"My carer will help me arrange appointments; she is very good."

"My daughter manages all my appointments and takes me to have my hair cut."

"I tend to go to the dentist and my GP, I arrange my appointments, the district nurse comes in to see my leg."

"Staff are friendly, polite and very helpful."

"I have always found the staff to be helpful, friendly and respectful, they are FANTASTIC."

"I like living here as the staff are lovely and pleasant to talk to."

It was observed that reception staff serve as the first point of contact for enquiries, as well as managing interactions with delivery drivers. During the visit, one driver behaved in a rude manner; however, the **staff member**

remained courteous and calmly reiterated the organisation's policy for parcel deliveries.

It was also observed that staff make regular telephone calls to tenants as part of their safe and well checks. These calls are carried out to ensure that tenants are safe, comfortable, and have no immediate concerns or unmet needs.

This proactive approach helps to provide reassurance, promote wellbeing, and ensure that any issues can be identified and addressed promptly.

No relatives were available during the visit; therefore, no feedback was obtained.

Conclusion

Staff provide good-quality, compassionate care and treat the people who live at Walker Grange with dignity and respect. They appear motivated, dedicated, and responsive to tenants' needs, creating a positive and supportive environment that promotes wellbeing and independence.

Both in terms of the building and its internal environment, Walker Grange was observed to require upgrading and refurbishment. Ongoing investment and planned refurbishment will help ensure Walker Grange remains comfortable, accessible, and welcoming for tenants. Updating communal areas, facilities, and key building features would support resident wellbeing, independence, and ease of access. Continued maintenance and improvements would also support staff in delivering a positive service and help strengthen the overall resident experience.

Recommendations

In keeping with the conclusion, the Registered Manager and Sandwell Council may wish to continue progressing planned improvements that support a comfortable, accessible, and welcoming environment for the people who live at Walker Grange.

- Continue with refurbishment of communal areas and key facilities to help improve comfort, appearance, accessibility, and energy efficiency.

- Review access arrangements, signage, and safety features to ensure tenants can move around the building and outdoor areas as easily and independently as possible.
- Consider further improvements to gardens, dining areas, quiet spaces, and activity opportunities to support tenants' wellbeing, choice, and social engagement.

Provider Response

Thank you to Healthwatch Sandwell for visiting Walker Grange and taking the time to speak with people who live there and members of staff.

We welcome the positive feedback about the care and support provided. It is particularly encouraging to hear that staff were described as kind, caring and respectful, and that people who live at Walker Grange feel supported and able to make choices about their everyday lives.

The report also highlights a number of areas where the building and grounds would benefit from improvement, including the décor, communal toilets, laundry room, lounge, garden, outdoor access, and general maintenance. We recognise these observations and welcome the opportunity to respond, particularly as they complement improvement work that is already underway or planned.

Extra Care at Walker Grange

Walker Grange is an extra care facility, where people live in their own flats and are supported to live as independently as possible. The level of care and support is tailored to each person, with some people requiring a small amount of support and others needing more regular assistance.

An important part of this approach is supporting people to make their own choices about their daily lives. This includes when they get up, what and where they eat, where they go and whether they choose to take part in activities. Where people need support from carers, this is provided in a way that respects those choices and reflects what matters to them.

It is also positive to see the report acknowledge the activities available within the communal areas for people who choose to take part.

Improvements to Flats

We already have a clear programme of investment in Walker Grange, and I am pleased that this work is progressing.

Six flats have been fully refurbished, with a further six currently being upgraded. The improvements are designed to create more open and accessible homes and to help people continue living at Walker Grange as their needs change, including people living with dementia or reduced mobility.

Improvements to Communal Areas

Further improvements are planned for the communal areas. The first stage will include work to:

the ladies' toilets.

the laundry room.

the corridors.

the communal lounge; and

the staff room.

A new servery area is also planned, and the old bar area in the lounge will be replaced with a more suitable space for relaxation and activities.

Contractors are currently working on the flats, and we are awaiting confirmed dates for work to begin in the ladies' toilets.

Importantly, people who live at Walker Grange and members of staff have been invited to share their views about the planned changes, including choices around colours, furniture, and furnishings. Budget approval is in place for some of the works and orders are being processed for some replacement furniture. We will continue to involve people as the work progresses so that the improvements reflect the needs and preferences of those who call Walker Grange home.

Safety and Access

We welcome the observations made about safety and accessibility and will use these to inform our ongoing improvement work. This will include looking at:

the door leading to the garden and patio.

access to the gardens for people who use wheelchairs or walking aids.

uneven paving.

garden tools and other items in outdoor areas.

electrical wires.

storage within the communal lounge; and

signage at the front of the building.

Where any issue requires more immediate attention, we will respond promptly. Other improvements will be incorporated into the service improvement plan so that progress can be followed through.

We are working with a community outreach group to help us tidy the gardens, and patio areas, with the aim of making sure they are safe, clean, accessible, and welcoming spaces for people to enjoy. This work started in August 2026.

Laundry Room and Communal Toilets

We appreciate the observations about the laundry room and communal toilets, including the missing tiles, damaged flooring, out-of-order machine, and waste arrangements.

These areas are already included within the planned programme of improvement work. In the meantime, staff will continue to report faults and monitor these areas to help ensure they remain clean and safe for people to use.

Information and Notice Boards

We have also noted the feedback about the notice boards in the reception area. We have recently purchased a larger notice board to share out the information. This has helped people to easily find the information they need, whilst making sure all important notices are visible. Staff will continue to review the information on display, removing information that is no longer current and making sure the boards stay tidy.

Activities and Community Links

Activities are available within Walker Grange, with people choosing whether and how they would like to take part.

We recognise that people's interests, preferences, and support needs are different, and activities will not always suit everyone. Staff will continue talking with people who live at Walker Grange about what they enjoy and what they would like to see offered, taking account of individual needs such as sight loss or reduced mobility.

The report also gives us an opportunity to consider how we can further support people who would like to take part in activities beyond Walker Grange.

Our approach will be to build on people's individual strengths, interests, and existing connections with their local community. The minibus is one option available to people who wish to use it, alongside other opportunities to maintain existing relationships, explore new interests and take part in community life in ways that are meaningful to them.

Our Commitment

We remain committed to making Walker Grange a safe, comfortable, and welcoming place for people to call home.

We value both the positive feedback and the areas highlighted for further improvement within the report. They will help inform the work already taking place at Walker Grange, with progress monitored through the service improvement plan.

Most importantly, we will continue to keep people who live at Walker Grange informed as the planned work progresses, listen to their views and involve them in decisions about their home.

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Operational Head, Learning Disability Services & Accommodation.



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