

News

Care watchdog was too slow to act over abuse at homes

Simon de Bruxelles

A chief inspector at the Care Quality Commission has admitted that it should have acted sooner to stop the abuse of vulnerable adults at two care homes.

Andrea Sutcliffe, the head of adult social care, said that the organisation “should have responded more quickly” after concerns were raised.

Thirteen directors and members of staff at the homes in Devon, run by Atlas Project Team, were convicted

after three separate trials at Bristol crown court of offences relating to the “organised and systemic abuse” of adults with learning difficulties.

Residents of the homes complained that they had been physically mistreated, forced to work for food and locked in punishment rooms.

During an inspection in April 2011 of the Veilstone home in Bideford, one isolation room, known as the quiet room, was not noted. It was only six months later, after one of the residents complained directly to the CQC, that

the inspectors returned and found it. A subsequent report said: “The only item of furniture was an armchair and the only fitting was a surveillance camera. The room was cold and there was no radiator. The window was locked. There was no curtain.”

Ms Sutcliffe said: “Since then we have overhauled our regulatory approach”, adding that this has involved a more thorough inspection process.

After the second visit to Veilstone in October 2011 “inspectors were so concerned that they quickly extended

the inspection to all 15 of the services run by Atlas.” These services were then closed down the following year.

At the other home, Gatooma in Holsworthy, five residents were forced to cook and clean, and staff eavesdropped on their telephone calls.

Andrew Langdon, QC, for the prosecution, told the court that staff tried to control residents “as though they were animals”. He said: “You can call it the Atlas culture. It was not a one-off but organised and systemic abuse.”

Jolyon Marshall, 42, a co-director at

Veilstone, was described in court by one of his victims as “the nastiest person you could ever come across”. He admitted charges relating to conspiracy to detain and imprison falsely and to pervert the course of justice. He had his 18-month prison sentence extended to 28 months by the attorney-general.

Paul Hewitt, 71, the founder, was found guilty of failing to discharge a duty in relation to the care of residents in his homes. He was fined £12,500 and ordered to pay costs of £105,000.

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