

Findings of a dementia audit: Northcourt Lodge Nursing Home, Reading

Where: Northcourt Lodge, 65 Northcourt Avenue, Reading, RG2 7HF

When: 18 October 2018

Why: Healthwatch Reading is visiting all care homes in Reading and gathering residents' views. In addition, we are using a national audit tool during a separate 'walk-around' of six care homes to see how the environment has been adapted to specifically support people with dementia.

How: Healthwatch Reading visited at a pre-agreed time with the care home and then made observations for each of the seven themes used in the audit tool. Northcourt Lodge's manager, Revathy Jayakumar, joined Healthwatch Reading for the audit 'walkaround', of the dementia section of the home, and answered any questions as they came up.

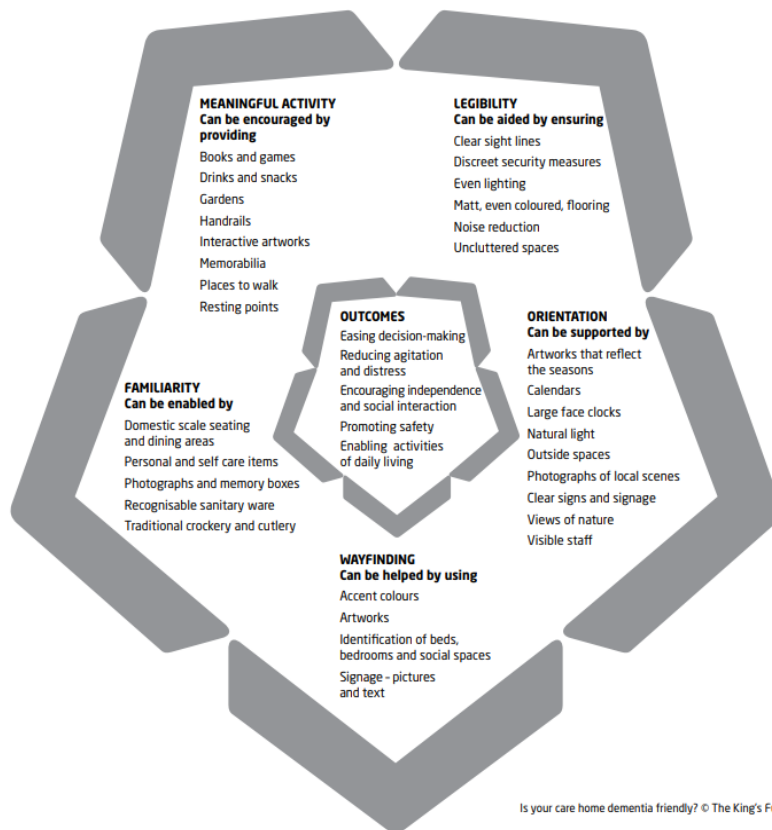
Main findings*: Overall, we concluded that Northcourt Lodge is a dementia-friendly environment, which could be even better if colour contrast was introduced in some areas and wall spaces had more features.

**Our findings relate only to the date of the visit and changes may have happened since then. Prospective clients (and/or relatives) are advised to carry out their own visit to a care home before making final decisions on whether they feel the care home is suitable for their needs.*



About the audit tool

Healthwatch Reading used an assessment tool called [*Is Your Care Home Dementia Friendly?*](#) It was developed by the national charity and research body, The King's Fund, as part of its Enhancing the Healing Environment programme, in 2014.



The tool is designed to be used during a walkaround of a care home. It is split into seven sections that ask up to 10 questions each, which should be scored from 1 (barely met) to 5 (totally met). A person can carry out the audit alone, but the King's Fund recommends it is done jointly with others involved in the person's care and/or life to ensure various views are considered and discussed.

Scores can be added up at the end of the exercise and used by

care homes to identify areas for improvement and/or make a case for extra investment, or by commissioners to compare different care homes in an area, according to the King's Fund.

How we used the audit tool

The audit visits are the second stage of a Healthwatch Reading project on the experience of care home residents across Reading. This firstly involved visiting all residential and nursing homes across the borough to collect residents' views about their daily life. Individual visit reports with care home managers' responses have been published on our website.

This second part of our project aims to look in more detail at the environment of dementia-specialist care homes. This would help us to understand if Reading is 'a place where people can live well with dementia' - one of the priorities of the *Reading Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020*.

Care homes voluntarily agreed to let us visit and carry out the audit and, in many cases, managers joined us for the exercise. We focused on observations and discussions about the seven themes rather than on scoring by numbers.

Northcourt Lodge audit findings:

1. Does the environment promote meaningful interaction and purposeful activity between people who live in the care home, their families and staff?

We found the care home:

- Had clear external signage and doorbell and on arrival, looked and felt welcoming, clean and cared for
- has a mix of social rooms, dining room and a quiet room
- the corner of the quiet lounge appeared cluttered
- had arranged single chairs in a circle, and some residents stayed in their wheelchair
- the quiet room had a sofa.

2. Does the environment promote well-being?

We found:

- there is good light throughout the home, from big windows from the patio, there are also low windows that help 'bring nature' in from the outside
- in some rooms the light can be adjusted by a lamp
- all the residents' room windows have blackout blinds
- the décor is in keeping with the home
- the light switches are not contrasted against the wall colour
- residents are able to use the space outside with support.

3. Does the environment encourage eating and drinking?

We found:

- the residents and the relatives have access to hot and cold drinks which are stationed in the dining room
- staff hand out drinks and snacks and in one of the communal spaces there is a bowl of fruit for the resident
- relatives are able to have access to the kitchen
- the home uses different coloured mugs and beakers for the residents and uses colourful tablecloth at mealtimes so crockery will stand out
- residents can choose where to eat but the manager said she tries to get everyone together at mealtimes so it's more of a social gathering
- there is enough space for staff to support residents who need help at mealtimes.

4. Does the environment promote mobility?

We found:

- there is space to walk both inside and out
- the flooring is matt wood and carpeted in most areas
- there are handrails in the corridor that are made of wood and stand out from the wall

- there are pictures in frames along the corridor but nothing that is three dimensional that could support residents with their fine motor skills and visual tracking
- residents will need staff support for the lift, which is located in the corridor
- there is no sheltered space outside for residents to sit or any point of interests in the garden.

Does the environment promote continence and personal hygiene?

We found:

- the toilets all have signs with words and pictures
- all toilet doors are painted in a single distinctive colour
- not all toilets seats have been changed into a single colour that is distinct to the bathroom - the manager said she has only changed the seats for the residents who can independently use the toilet, but has left the other toilet seats unchanged for those residents who always need support to use them
- basin and baths are in familiar designs
- the toilet spaces are big enough for a wheelchair and/or staff to assist the residents, even with the door closed
- the taps are not labelled hot and cold.

6. Does the environment promote orientation?

We found:

- doors for the communal area have clear transparent panels to show which room you are entering
- all signs are good size and are contrasting so they can be seen easily
- residents have their own pictures in a frame on their front door to help them locate their room and their rooms are personalised with familiar objects
- strong patterns have been avoided on the walls and home furnishing
- there are clocks located in different rooms and in the communal space there is a big clock with a date that residents can view
- there are some mirrors in the home

7. Does the environment promote calm, safety and security?

We found:

- the home tries hard to keep the noise down and has carpet throughout the home apart from the dining room
- the residents decide themselves what to watch on television between them and the music they want to listen to
- fire exits and 'staff only' rooms such as the laundry and kitchen are labelled as such
- the home provides provision for relatives who want to stay the night, when their loved ones are at the end of life
- all hazardous and cleaning material are locked away from residents

- some spaces in the home could be utilised differently and made clutter free such as in the quiet lounge room/

Areas for improvement

- change the light switches to show contrast with the surrounding walls in resident rooms
- rearrange the space in the quiet communal lounge to be clutter free
- consider using the corridor wall space more imaginatively, with three-dimensional mounted panel to support residents with visual tracking and fine and gross motor dexterity which will also support eye/hand coordination

The King's Fund tool states: 'Providing visual clues and prompts, including accent colours and artworks...will help with orientation'.

Clutter should be avoided as it 'can cause added confusion' for people with dementia, the tool also states.

Response from Northcourt Lodge

'Thank you for your visit. As usual it was useful. We have used the same tool [previously] to assess the home and will make improvements which we are already aware of.'

Acknowledgements and other information

Healthwatch Reading thanks the manager for welcoming us for an additional visit to carry out this dementia audit. Our findings relate to how we observed the care home on the date of the visit and the care home may have made changes/improvements since this date. Good practice guidance suggests that prospective residents and/or families carry out their own visits to a care home before making a final decision.

Healthwatch Reading is an independent charity with some statutory powers. We can take your feedback in confidence, help you make complaints, and refer serious concerns to other agencies. Contact us on 0118 937 2295 if you do not have internet access and would like help accessing any online information referenced in this report.