

## **Suffolk Lodge - a dementia friendly environment**



**December 2017**

## **Introduction**

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, as consumer champion for health and social care speak to people about their experiences of care in order to find out what is working well and what could improve.

The Health and Social Care Act allows Healthwatch Authorised Representatives to observe service deliver, talk to services users and their families on premises such as hospitals, residential care homes. GP practices, dental surgeries, opticians and pharmacies.

This visit was not an Enter and View visit but an informal visit to test out a new tool looking at how dementia friendly a care environment is

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Wendy Luck, Manager for being so willing to let us test out this new tool. Wendy was welcoming, opening and supportive. It is obvious that she is passionate about innovation and good practice.

## **Disclaimer**

Please note that this relates to findings observed on a specific date and time. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of the service users and staff, only an account of what was observed at the time.

## Purpose of the visit

### What we hoped to get out of the visit is:

- Observe the physical environment to assess its dementia friendliness.
- Observe communal spaces, personal spaces, familiar objects, way-finding and signage, furniture, visual access, colour, lighting and outdoor spaces.
- Observe the social environment and understanding how person centred the care is.
- Observe staff communication skills, awareness of resident's needs, engagement with relatives and visitors, least restrictive interventions, food and drink, meaningful activity etc.

## General Overview

Suffolk Lodge provides accommodation and care for up to 40 people, who have care needs associated with old age or dementia. The home is purpose built, located close to Wokingham town centre, with accommodation on the ground and first floor. The home is divided into separate living units, each providing accommodation for 7 or 8 people.

All areas have their own kitchen, bathroom, lounge/diner and separate toilets

## Methodology

There are some key features that can be applied to the environment to help the person with dementia to be able to live well, experience as little disability and as much independence in function and social opportunity as possible. These features require an understanding of the impact of dementia and the likely impairments that people living with a dementia may experience. By acknowledging these impairments, links can be made to create optimum physical and social environments

A care home for people living with a dementia should provide features which enable the person to:

- Recognise their surroundings and make sense of their current situation
- Find their way
- Take part in everyday activities both in the home and community

- Take part in therapeutic activities designed to meet their unique needs
- Be safe and protected from harm
- Be able to take reasonable risks
- Have their own personal space
- Take control of their own environment

An observation of the physical environment at Suffolk Lodge aimed to establish whether these features were present. In practical terms, this involved the visiting team observing the following areas of the care home and judging whether each individual feature was present:

- Communal Spaces
- Familiar Objects
- Personal Spaces
- Way Finding
- Visual Access
- Furniture
- Colour
- Lighting
- Outside Space

The observations involved a “walk around” of the home by the observer.

## **Findings**

### **The Physical environment**

#### **Communal Spaces**

The corridors at Suffolk Lodge had interesting features on the walls that provide a focal point of interest and create memorable signposting. Corridors led to conservatory with seating and then to outdoors. Dead ends were mostly avoided or made interesting (e.g. with fiddle locks).

There was evidence of age and culturally appropriate objects in the communal areas to act as orientation cues and to stimulate every day familiar activity. Different objects in communal areas, pictures, book cases, good views of garden from windows. A variety of contrasting focal points was also created in the lounges and other communal areas. The call bell system at Suffolk Lodge was not heard but members of

staff told us that when it sounds it is not too loud or intrusive. Loud call bells can cause some people distress.

Suffolk Lodge smelt fresh and clean. There were no unpleasant smells in the communal spaces including the bathroom and toilets.

## **Recommendation**

### **Communal Spaces**

Employ more contrasting colours in the corridors to help people navigate better. Contrasting colours on the walls and doors can give the person with dementia a sense of depth and perspective to help them to define important aspects of the environment.

### **Personal Space**

There were visible personal belongings, possessions and furniture in personal spaces and private spaces. Most bedrooms were personalised with objects and pictures with frames of reference for the person with dementia. This is important as a person's belongings should be welcomed into any care setting to help create a home like environment. These should always be used appropriately by members of the care team to reinforce identity.

Most of the bathrooms at Suffolk Lodge displayed access to low level directional lights which could be left on at night. Again, this is important as night time directional lights can assist with way finding

Most of the bedrooms did not display a personalised entrance, only a simple name badge and number. Often every corridor or door can look the same within a care setting. Personalised bedroom signs can help people with Alzheimer's or dementia recognise where their bedroom is. Painting the doors different colours could also help.

The bathrooms did not have a mirror that could easily be removed or covered by shutters/doors. The option to cover the mirror is important for people living with a

dementia as there can be a range of triggers that can cause agitation. For many this can include mirrors, the reflection can be confusing as the person may not recognise themselves.

## **Recommendation**

### **Personal Space**

Reduce the potential for distress by having the option to remove or cover the mirrors. Taking away mirrors could be detrimental to those who like the reflection and it is not fair to those who have no unusual response. A solution, therefore must be flexible and adaptable on a patient by patient basis. One suggestions could be to employ reversible mirrors.

Another recommendation would be that bedroom doors are painted different colours and the doorways are personalised more.

### **Familiar Objects**

The décor at Suffolk Lodge is age and culturally appropriate. This is important because the diversity of those living in the care setting should be reflected in the décor and objects and imagery.

Views from the windows at Suffolk Lodge are not obscured by heavy pelmets or net curtains. This is important as people with dementia should be enabled to see the outside world and feel connected with the community.

There were lovely outlooks to garden from all areas and none were obscured.

There are recognisable an easy access to bathroom facilities and some visible bathroom accessorise at Suffolk Lodge. There could be more ornaments such as colourful shower curtains, toiletries and towels (only for orientation and not for use in communal bathrooms), 'safe' candles, music facilities, etc. The view from all bathrooms should be a domestic one and not clinical however we saw NHS hand washing posters laminated and stuck to wall

## Recommendation

### Familiar Objects

The toilets and bathrooms have a clinical appearance. It is suggested that the residents, their relatives and staff look together at ways to make the toilets and bathrooms more “homely”.

The bathing experience could be made more enjoyable if the view from the bath was more interesting, relaxing or engaging. Pictures or objects should be in the direct line of sight from the bath.

It is also recommended that clinical or hygiene focused items such as paper hand towel dispensers, sterile wipes, shelves with protective clothing be placed out of sight or housed in a cupboard as this will reduce the clinical appearance of these rooms and make them look more homely.

### Way Finding

At Suffolk Lodge there are appropriate noticeboards for orientating messages.



Signage in most areas is clear and prominent in a constant colour to the wall. The signage uses familiar pictures and words in lower case lettering. However, we did not see this signage consistently with picture and the word too. E.g. not all toilets had picture of toilet and the word toilet

## Recommendation

### Way Finding

Directional signage could be more consistent with use of contrasting colours and familiar pictures with words in lower case lettering. This would maximize opportunity for people to find their way around which has the obvious advantages of getting them to the right place but also minimises anxiety.

### Visual Access

There is good visual access to all relevant areas (toilets, dining rooms, the outdoors) at Suffolk Lodge.

There are easily visible handrails around the corridors. This is paramount as handrails should be in all corridors and painted a contrasting colour from the wall.

There were a few barriers to crossing thresholds. There were good colour differences on some doorway thresholds. However, there were several areas there was a change in flooring material at thresholds, metal strips in doorways, that could cause confusion, anxiety. E.g. change from hard flooring to carpet, toilet flooring dark and glittery.

Not all dining rooms had contrasting colour plates and table clothes. We saw on  yellow plate but it was on a yellow table cloth.

## **Recommendation**

### **Visual Access**

It is recommended that thresholds are clear to ensure that visual barriers (such as change in flooring) are minimised to avoid confusion and distress.

Contrasting edges can be perceived as a barrier by some people with dementia. In such circumstances stark contrasts at floor level might become a hazard.

### **Furniture**

There is domestic a to most furniture especially in the lounges. All furniture appeared to be age appropriate. However, we did see the same chair colour that matched the floor colour which could cause confusion.

The arrangement and provision of furniture enabled social opportunities to occur. We saw footrests and specs for storing mobility aids within reach. There were coffee tables and sideboards filled with familiar objects that may facilitate exploration and used.

There was furniture of different heights and chairs with blades/runners instead of feet to enable physical abilities. There were a variety of open shelves and glass fronted cupboards. Objects that are designed to be used by people with dementia. However one bookcase was inaccessible as it was directly behind an occupied chair.

## **Recommendation**

### **Furniture**

It is recommended that residents can get access to bookcases.



## Colour

Colour is used throughout Suffolk Lodge to reduce awareness of unsafe areas. Some people with dementia may become agitated and frustrated if they cannot get through obvious doors which for security or safety reasons are kept locked. Doors that lead to “higher risk” areas should be made less visible; the doorway should be unpanelled and give the same treatment as the walls around them. Door furniture should be discrete and the same colour as the door.

Most skirting boards and doorframes are in contrast colour to the floor and walls. Good dementia practice dictates that to support greater awareness of floor, wall and doorway definition, skirting boards and doorframes should be in a contrast colour to the walls and flooring.

No pattern is used on most surfaces at Suffolk Lodge. Textbook dementia practice suggests that walls and floor treatments and all soft furnishings should be free of bold patterns. Some people with dementia have difficulties with processing the visual information and what is 2 dimensional may appear 3 dimensional or fluctuate between the two. The sparkly/ glittery lino in one of the bathrooms could cause confusion as people may think they have dropped something, such as coins, and bend to pick it up.

The colour of all toilet seats at Suffolk Lodge contrasts with the toilet bowl and floor/wall. To aid with orientation, it is good practice to have toilet seating in a strong contrast colour to the pan and the wall.

## **Recommendation**

### Colour

It is suggested that bedroom doors be more distinctive by using colour and personalisation to help raise awareness and aid navigation.

## Lighting

There is a range of different types of ‘domestic-style’ lighting to create different ‘moods’ and promote recognition of place at Suffolk Lodge. These include table lamps, standard lamps, reading lamps and wall lamps. The lighting levels were able to be increased to support visibility in work areas and facility to lower lighting to ‘darkness’ at night. Some areas did not have dimmers.

Most of the walls, woodwork, floors and surfaces have non-reflective/low-sheen treatments. The shiny floor and glittery lino in one of the bathrooms could cause confusion and anxiety for some people with dementia

## **Recommendation**

### **Lighting**

Ensure all areas have a range of lighting including dimmer switches.

Attention to be paid to the contrasting flooring, patterned surfaces can increase a state of anxiety for people with dementia.

### **Outside Space**

There are traditional and familiar outdoor objects to enable every day familiar activity. These objects were often familiar and relevant to an outdoor setting. e.g. garden tools, greenhouses, tables and chairs, benches, parasols, bird tables, safe water features, washing lines, etc. Objects should not set a person with dementia up to fail.

The landscaping enabled orientation to the time of the year and season. Autumn colours. Mounds of leaves and pumpkins were seen. The planting and ornamentation did facilitate a variety of sensory experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough would like to thank Suffolk Lodge Manager, Wendy Luck, her staff, residents and visitors to welcoming us into their home. This report relates to findings observed on one day in September 2017. The report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all services users or staff, only an account of what was observed at the time.

Overall Healthwatch felt that Suffolk Lodge provided a good insight into residential care. Suffolk Lodge achieved a very high Healthwatch observational rating meaning the needs of the home exceeded expectations. The physical environment is progressing to a very high position compared to other care settings in developing its person centre dementia care approaches to meet the needs of people living with a dementia.

Healthwatch Wokingham Borough is keen to find out how useful this report has been to you and/or your organisation in further developing your services. Please provide feedback by e mailing [enquiries@healthwatchwokingham.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchwokingham.co.uk)

## Service Provider's Response

Thank you for completing the survey, and we are proud to be chosen for the pilot.

Having read the report we have found it immensely helpful with the suggestions and recommendations for Suffolk Lodge to become more dementia friendly. We will certainly take it on board as we are eager to make our home a better home for people living daily with dementia., it's the simplest of things that can make life difficult when you have dementia, we hope to improve this for all our lovely residents and with your support on the audit we might just achieve it.

We would welcome you back maybe this time next year to observe our areas of reconditions, the audit has been really good for me to be able to drive the key areas that can able achieved with minimal expense

Thanking you and the team

WENDY LUCK, REGISTERED MANAGER



## Is your environment dementia friendly?

If you would like Healthwatch to test out how dementia friendly your environment is please get in touch by e mailing [Nicola.strudley@healthwatchwokingham.co.uk](mailto:Nicola.strudley@healthwatchwokingham.co.uk) or call 0118 418 1418