

Enter & View visit
to

Poplars Nursing Home
September 2025



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.

Background

HWS Enter and View Programme 2025/26

Taking into consideration the rationale and criteria for visits, the Enter and View programme for 2025/26 will visit:

- **Care homes that support people with dementia**
- **Hospital wards who care for people with dementia when staying in hospital**

We will engage with people with dementia, 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.



The programme will provide a report of the visits. 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.

This project explores the impact of dementia within care home settings, with a particular focus on Sandwell, a borough in the West Midlands that faces significant health and social challenges due to high levels of deprivation and an aging population.

Sandwell's Dementia Strategy (2019–2025) outlines a comprehensive approach to supporting individuals with dementia and their carers. [Better Lives: Sandwell's Dementia Strategy | Sandwell Council](#)

The borough is working toward becoming a Dementia Friendly Community, with a focus on personalised care, better-trained staff, and clearer service pathways.

On this occasion we have conducted an Enter and View visit that looks at the experience of people with dementia, living in a care home.

The Poplars Nursing Home

Our Enter and View visit focused on The Poplars Nursing Home, owned by The Poplars Care & Support Services Limited.

The home is situated in Smethwick, a culturally diverse area within the Sandwell local authority, known for its strong community ties and multi-ethnic population.

The Poplars Nursing Home is a large, family-run care facility located at 66 South Road, Smethwick, West Midlands, B67 7BP. It provides accommodation and nursing care for up to **58 residents**, catering to both **older adults (65+)** and **younger adults** with a range of needs including **dementia, physical disabilities**, and **chronic health conditions**.

The facility is undergoing a **£3.5 million investment**, aimed at enhancing its infrastructure and services.

The home has received a **“Requires Improvement”** (June 2023) rating from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), with strengths noted in **caring** and **responsiveness**, and ongoing efforts to improve leadership and safety standards. [32672d40-1785-454d-b846-3603b120f774](#)

Our report

Our report reflects the findings and observations made during the visit conducted on 4th September 2025. It does not purport to represent the views of all individuals present, but solely those who provided feedback within the limited timeframe available. It is anticipated that these recommendations will support enhancements in service delivery, thereby contributing to improved experiences for service users.

The visit was conducted by HWS Authorised Representatives (AR):

Helen Bennett, Tracy Cresswell, Tonia Flannagan & Annajit Johal

Methodology

During the visit ARs engaged in conversations with residents, their relatives and staff members using a structured set of questions, these focused on two key areas.



Service User 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.

Findings

Healthy Environment

The external environment of The Poplars was well presented. Clear signage was visible from the roadside, and two main entrance doors were noted. The front garden appeared clean and well-maintained. While on-site parking was limited, off-road parking options were available nearby. The exterior of the building was in good condition, showing signs of regular upkeep. No CCTV cameras were observed. Both entrance doors were

equipped with a secure entry system, ensuring controlled access to the premises.

At the rear of the property, representatives noted a well-maintained small garden alongside a compact patio area, which included a ramp for accessible entry. A wooden pagoda offered shaded seating, providing a comfortable space for outdoor use. A code-locked side gate was observed to be in active use, while the main gate appeared unused at the time of the visit. It was also noted that the ashtray within the pagoda was full of cigarette butts.

Observation.

At the time of the observation, the chef in full uniform was sitting in the Pagoda smoking. This was relayed to management.

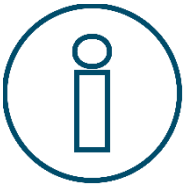
Internal environment – The reception area presented a clean and orderly appearance, though it was narrow in layout. Active cleaning was underway, clearly indicated by prominently displayed hazard signs to ensure visitor safety. A visitors' book was strategically placed at the entrance and was consistently used by all individuals entering the premises, reflecting a well-maintained protocol for tracking, and managing access. The overall atmosphere conveyed a sense of attentiveness to hygiene, safety, and administrative organization.

Upon arrival, no unpleasant odours were detected throughout the premises, contributing to a clean and welcoming atmosphere. The décor appeared mismatched, with a blend of styles and colours that lacked cohesion but did not detract significantly from the overall environment. Furnishings were in good condition, though there was a noticeable variation in the types of chairs used—differing in colour, size, and design—which may affect the aesthetic consistency and comfort for users.

The building was well illuminated, benefiting from both artificial lighting and ample natural light streaming through windows, which enhanced the sense of openness and warmth. The ambient temperature was comfortable and well-regulated, creating a pleasant indoor climate. Overall, the space felt functional and adequately maintained, though some improvements in interior design and furniture uniformity could enhance the overall presentation and user experience.

Staff Comment.

"The Poplars is currently undergoing refurbishment, which explains why some areas appeared untidy."



Prior to the visit, a promotional poster was sent to The Poplars to inform service users about the upcoming Enter and View visit. It was intended to be displayed in the waiting area to ensure residents were aware of the visit. However, during the visit, the poster was not visible on any noticeboard.

Clear and appropriate signage, along with pictorial guidance, was prominently displayed throughout the corridors. Noticeboards were well-utilised to communicate essential information, including the current CQC rating, COSHH regulations, and infection control protocols, contributing to a well-informed and safety-conscious environment.

The Poplars consists of two floors, both of which are accessible via a lift and a staircase, ensuring ease of movement for residents and staff. During the walk-through, the corridors were observed to have adequate handrails, supporting safe navigation. However, a vacuum cleaner and a power tool battery being charged were noted (both with trailing wires). This was relayed to the manager.

The walls were painted in muted tones, contributing to a calming environment, and were adorned with various pictures that added warmth and visual interest. The flooring featured a mix of textures and colours, which may currently present some inconsistencies but is scheduled to be addressed as part of the ongoing refurbishment.

The bathrooms and toilets were observed to be clean, tidy, and free from unnecessary clutter, apart from hoists, which are appropriately stored and used to assist residents with mobility needs. It was noted that the toilet seats were the same colour as the pedestals. This was discussed with the manager, as using a contrasting colour for toilet seats can serve as a valuable visual aid for individuals living with dementia, helping to improve orientation and independence.

<https://www.worcester.ac.uk/about/academic-schools/school-of-health-and-wellbeing/health-and-wellbeing-research/association-for-dementia-studies/>

Wall-mounted hand sanitisers were fully stocked and readily available for use. However, it was noted that the holders for latex gloves were empty at the time of observation, which may impact infection control practices and should be addressed promptly.

Residents' bedrooms are cleaned daily and are decorated according to their personal preferences, creating a homely and individualised environment. Each room is equipped with a television and access to Wi-Fi, supporting both comfort and connectivity. A 'topic board' is displayed in every bedroom, providing staff with key information about the resident's personal needs, preferences, and dislikes, which supports person-centred care. In the main nursing section of the home, resident photos are currently used on bedroom doors for identification. However, it was suggested that some individuals may not recognise their own image due to cognitive decline. As an alternative, the use of a familiar object or image—like those featured on the topic boards—could be considered to better support recognition and orientation for those living with dementia.

The communal and conservatory areas were clean and well-maintained, contributing to a pleasant, shared environment. However, one corner of the space contained wheelchairs, hoists, and walking frames, which would benefit from being appropriately stored to maintain clear access and uphold safety standards.

In a separate area of another room, it was observed that electrical cables associated with the television were left trailing and exposed, presenting a potential hazard.

"The Authorised Representatives were given the opportunity to view part of the newly refurbished section of the home. The décor was noticeably more vibrant, with colour-coded zones designed to enhance visibility and support memory recall, particularly for residents living with dementia.

A mural depicting a coffee shop scene had been painted on the wall, contributing to a welcoming and engaging environment. Additionally, a functional post box was installed, allowing residents to actively participate in sending and receiving mail. The flooring throughout the area was of high quality and consistent in texture and tone, contributing to a safer and more cohesive environment."

Essential services

Management and staff record daily updates using the PCS system, ensuring consistent documentation of care and support activities. The Registered Manager also uses the SIP (Service Improvement Plan) tool daily, which serves as an audit and quality improvement resource. Resident assessments are conducted by the nursing team in collaboration with family members, promoting a holistic and person-centred approach to care planning.

Access to care plans and records allows families to stay informed, contribute valuable insights, and feel reassured that care is aligned with the resident's preferences and evolving needs.

Residents have the option to retain their own General Practitioner (GP), supporting continuity of care and personal choice. Dr. Hague, based on High Street in West Bromwich, conducts a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meeting every two weeks. These meetings allow him to stay informed and updated on all aspects of residents' health and wellbeing, ensuring coordinated care across professionals and services.

Therapies and Allied Health Services

- **Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists** attend based on referral needs.
- **Speech and Language Therapists** attend based on referral needs.
- **NHS Podiatry** services are provided weekly.
- **Advanced Nurse Practitioner** attends weekly.
- **Opticians** and **dentists** offer home visits.
- **Pharmacy Services** – Medication needs are supported through delivery services provided by Quantum.

Accessibility and Inclusion

People with dementia or memory loss often recognise and process information in diverse ways. Some can read written text, while others rely more on visual prompts such as symbols, pictures, or colour coding.

- Clear signage that combines words with images and uses contrasting colours for visibility.

- Consistent use of colour to help identify different areas (e.g. bathrooms, dining spaces, lounges).
- Landmarks and memory cues in hallways and communal spaces to support orientation.
- Good lighting and reduced glare to improve clarity and reduce confusion.
- Simple, uncluttered layouts that make it easier for residents to navigate independently.

Physical Accessibility

All areas of The Poplars observed during the visit were accessible to individuals with physical disabilities. Accessibility features included handrails throughout, ramps leading to outdoor spaces, and a lift servicing all floors. Evacuation mats were visible, clean, and appropriately positioned, as were fire extinguishers. Both the stairs and lift were clean and in good working order, and all fire exits were clearly marked, supporting a safe and inclusive environment.

Support for Learning Disabilities

All Staff have experience supporting residents with learning disabilities. The Manager confirmed that Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism, as required under the Health and Care Act 2022, has been delivered to all staff at The Poplars.

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/learning-disability/current-projects/oliver-mcgowan-mandatory-training-learning-disability-autism>

Support for Visual Impairment

The newly refurbished section of the building has been thoughtfully divided into colour-coded zones, designed to support individuals with visual impairments and cognitive challenges by enhancing orientation and ease of navigation throughout the environment.

Ethnic Diversity and Language Support

For residents who speak English as a second language, translation support is available through care staff fluent in Punjabi, Polish, and Russian. Additional assistance is provided via Language Line and digital tools such as Google Translate.

Information & Education

The reception area at The Poplars offers a variety of information guides and leaflets for both residents and visitors. Notice boards display current policies and procedures, including the latest Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating. Weekly activity timetables are posted in the corridors, along with photographs of residents who participated. Residents' birthdays are also highlighted and celebrated. In the Orchard Unit, a monthly newsletter is displayed to keep everyone informed and engaged.

Choice

Residents at The Poplars consistently praised the quality of the food and beverages provided. Menu options were offered the day before, allowing residents to make their selections in advance. The kitchen team catered to all dietary requirements, including providing snack boxes and fortified drinks. The cook also prepared a special milkshake for residents. Any changes to dietary needs were promptly communicated to the kitchen.

Residents had the freedom to choose their clothing each day, with garments clearly labelled with their names. Where relatives were unable to label clothing, staff aided. Personal touches and decorations in residents' rooms helped them identify and feel at home in their own space.

Safe, dignified quality Care

Residents at The Poplars reported feeling safe and secure within both their private rooms and communal areas. Those who are physically able are encouraged and supported to move freely and independently throughout the facility. Staff promote the maintenance of personal routines, allowing residents to choose when they wake up, rest during the day, and take a shower. The residents that we engaged with expressed that they could be themselves. This level of autonomy contributes to a sense of dignity, comfort, and personal control, which is especially important in fostering emotional wellbeing and a homelike atmosphere.

In house activities

A wide range of in-house activities is offered daily, with schedules clearly displayed on corridor noticeboards. Activities include gentle exercise, arts and crafts, bingo, quizzes, and movie nights, all organised by the activity coordinator. Care staff also actively participate in these sessions. Management is currently recruiting a new activity coordinator due to the departure of the current postholder.

A local musician regularly visits The Poplars to lead sing-along sessions, which are well-received by residents. Each resident's room features a 'talking board' that outlines their preferred activities. Care staff monitor these preferences and communicate them to the activity coordinator to ensure personalised engagement.

Listened to and being Involved

Residents at The Poplars expressed that they feel genuinely listened to and supported when sharing their views and preferences. Regular opportunities are provided for residents to offer feedback, including suggestions for changes to the menu, which are actively considered by the catering team. This inclusive approach helps ensure that individual tastes and dietary needs are respected and met.

Although no relatives were present during the visit, management confirmed that monthly service user meetings are held, where family members are warmly encouraged to attend and contribute. These meetings serve as a valuable platform for open dialogue between staff, residents, and their families. In addition to face-to-face engagement, surveys are routinely distributed to residents, relatives, and staff to gather insights, identify emerging needs, and continuously improve the quality of care and services provided.

Complaints

The Poplars maintains an open-door policy for managing complaints, ensuring that both residents and their families have easy access to raise concerns in a transparent and supportive environment. In addition to this, regular drop-in sessions are held to promote open communication and provide informal opportunities for feedback and discussion.

All complaints are formally documented within the home's internal system and are subject to a thorough investigation process, following established procedures. This structured approach not only ensures accountability but also helps inform future practice and contributes to ongoing service improvements.

Although no relatives were present during the visit, management assured that all family members are fully informed about the complaints procedure and understand how to access it. The home actively encourages relatives to engage in the process, reinforcing a culture of openness and continuous improvement.

Staffing

Caroline Crawford currently serves as the registered manager of The Poplars, marking her second tenure at the home. Her return reflects a

strong commitment to the service and a deep understanding of its values and operations. Caroline leads a resolute and compassionate team of staff who work collaboratively to ensure high standards of care and support for all residents. Her leadership is characterised by approachability, professionalism, and a clear focus on resident wellbeing and staff development. Her staff comprise of:

- 2 Deputy managers
- 1 Administrative
- Care staff 8 daytime 6 night-time
- Nurses 2 daytime 1 night-time
- Nursing assistants 1 daytime 1 night-time
- Domestics 3 cleaners 2 laundry
- 1 Cook 1 catering assistant
- 1 activity co-ordinator
- 1 gardener 1 painter & decorator

The Poplars does not employ agency staff, ensuring consistency and continuity in care through a stable and familiar team. Nursing staff are easily identifiable by their professional uniforms and name badges, promoting a sense of trust and accountability. Care assistants wear coordinated black tops and trousers, maintaining a smart and approachable appearance. Kitchen staff are dressed in traditional chef's whites, reflecting their role in preparing nutritious and high-quality meals for residents. This clear distinction in attire helps residents and visitors easily recognise staff roles and responsibilities throughout the home.

Training and Development

- **Quality Standards:** All care staff are up to date with current quality care standards, ensuring consistent and safe practices across the service.
- **Induction Programme:** New staff undergo a two-day familiarisation period, followed by a structured buddying system. This supports a smooth transition into the role and promotes confidence in delivering care. A comprehensive 12-week induction programme is in place, which includes a combination of workbook-based learning and e-module training to cover essential topics.
- **Specialist Training:**
 - All staff have completed **Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training** in learning disability and autism, reflecting the home's commitment to inclusive and informed care.
 - **British Sign Language (BSL)** training is not currently held by any staff members.

Team Communication

- **Daily Briefings:** The registered manager meets with her deputy managers each day to discuss any updates, concerns, or operational matters. This ensures consistent oversight and prompt response to emerging issues.
 - **Regular Meetings:** Staff and resident meetings are held regularly, with additional sessions arranged as needed to address specific topics or concerns. These meetings provide valuable opportunities for open dialogue and shared decision-making.
 - **Support from Head Office:** Both staff and management report feeling well-supported by The Poplars' head office, contributing to a positive working environment and effective service delivery.
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Comments and Feedback from Residents and Staff

"It's got a nice, homely feel, it's a nice place".

"I like it here, it's nice & the staff are friendly."

"I like watching the quiz games on the TV."

"I am not allowed to go outside without a member of staff."

"The staff are good, really good."

"I like the music man because I like to sing."

"The food is great, I like the 'all day' breakfast."

"I have worked here for two years now, and I really enjoy it."

"It is a lovely place to work, supportive management."

Summary

The Poplars Nursing Home operates with an elevated level of efficiency and is well-managed under experienced leadership. Both management and care staff consistently demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering high-quality care, showing empathy, respect, and attentiveness to the individual needs of each resident.

Care plans are well-structured and tailored to meet the personal care requirements of each resident. They reflect a person-centred approach, ensuring that individual preferences, health needs, and routines are respected and supported.

Ongoing renovation work is visibly enhancing the environment. The newly refurbished areas observed during the visit reflect thoughtful improvements that contribute to a warm, welcoming, and comfortable setting for residents. These upgrades are designed to promote wellbeing and create a homely atmosphere.

Recommendations

The Registered Manager and Head office of The Poplars to consider:

- Ensure staff are not visible to residents or visitors while smoking.
- Confirm that latex gloves are properly filled and ready for use.
- Store wheelchairs and other mobility aids safely when not in use.
- Secure or remove any trailing wires to prevent hazards.
- Explore alternative methods to support resident recognition instead of using photos on bedroom doors.
- Reconsider the use of coloured toilet seats to enhance visibility and accessibility.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Sandwell extends its sincere thanks to **Caroline Crawford** and the care team at **The Poplars** for their cooperation and engagement during the visit.

This visit has provided valuable insights that contribute to Healthwatch Sandwell's ongoing assessment of health, care, and support services across the borough.

Any concerns identified during this process will be addressed separately with the **Sandwell Health & Care Partnership Board**, independent of this visit.

Provider feedback

On the day of your visit to The Poplars (4th September), we had 32 residents living at the home.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the Sandwell Health Watch team for your visit and the comprehensive report. We greatly appreciate the positive feedback, recognition of the good standards of care, and the encouraging words shared by your team. It was reassuring to see that the dedication and hard work of our staff were reflected in your findings.

Our feedback on the report is entirely positive, and we are happy with all the findings. We are already working on the recommendations provided and view them as valuable guidance to help us continue improving our service and maintaining high-quality care for our residents.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need any further information or clarification.

Kind Regards,

Caroline Crawford

Registered Manager

Poplars Nursing Home

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