



**Evolving
Communities**

Giving people a voice to influence positive
change in health and social care

Independent visit report

Smallwood Court Care Home

Visit date:

10 and 11 September 2025

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About the visit

Two representatives of [Evolving Communities](#), an independent specialist in user-voice and quality of health and care services, visited Smallwood Court over two days. They spoke with residents, relatives and members of staff. They also observed residents in their day-to-day lives including interactions with staff, lunch and activities. Observations were also made about the environment within Smallwood Court.

About Smallwood Court

Smallwood Court is a purpose-built care home. It provides accommodation with personal and nursing care for older people. It also has a specialist floor for people living with dementia. The Smallwood Court can care for 76 residents in 64 rooms – there are suites for couples available. All residents have their own room with an ensuite shower and toilet. Accommodation is spaced over three floors, each with its own dining room. General personal and nursing care is provided on the first and second floors. The third floor is a specialist unit for people living with dementia.

Residents and their visitors also have a range of facilities on the ground floor including three lounges, a dedicated activities room and a café style dining space so that residents can eat with friends and family. There is a garden that has wheelchair accessible pathways and raised beds.

Key findings

- Smallwood Court and its staff are warm and welcoming.
- Our overall impression is that care is personal and individual and focused on the needs of the resident.
- Residents told us that they were happy, treated with respect and felt safe.
- We noticed a good rapport between staff and residents and that staff have a sense of pride in their work.
- Residents and their relatives spoke highly about Smallwood Court and how it is managed.
- Relatives have open access to Smallwood Court and are encouraged to get involved.
- The home is clean, well furnished, light and airy.
- The environment is calm and orderly. Staff and residents appear relaxed.
- Staff seem happy and committed to their work. They appear to work well as a team.
- A range of activities is on offer that caters to different preferences. Information about planned activities is posted on a wall in reception and available on printed sheets.
- Residents are attended to promptly. This includes responding to personal care needs and supporting residents to move around the home as they choose.
- Relatives told us they have confidence that their loved ones are well looked after and that if they had any concerns, they would be listened to and acted on.

Key recommendations

- Give more frequent opportunities for relatives to attend relatives' meetings.
- Extend dementia friendly decoration outside of the third floor, for instance contrasting doors, floor and wall colours. Install contrasting toilet seat covers in communal toilets.
- Consider increasing the range of items used to stimulate residents on the specialist dementia floor, for example, more tactile objects and memory boxes for individuals.
- Discuss the use of carpets with residents in some areas of the home where deep cleaning has been challenging. Any change should be discussed with residents (and their relatives) and mindful of the the need for Smallwood Court to feel like their home.
- Reach out to local organisations to engage residents with increased opportunities for interaction and activities, including bringing pets and animals into the home.
- Consider purchasing a limited number of tablets for residents to share, so that they can keep up to date with their interests and stay in touch with loved ones, with support from staff if needed.
- Add names of staff to the staff picture board.
- Undertake an audit of signage to ensure that they are in a plain font and at an appropriate height.

Observations and findings

Residents and families

During the visit the residents were observed to be:

- Involved in conversations with other residents.
- Interested in the visiting team, and keen to speak and interact with them.
- Taking part in activities in the communal areas.
- Interacting with staff for activities, personal care, eating lunch and in spontaneous conversations.

How they feel about their home

Residents told us that they were happy, saying:

- “It’s great here.”
- “I love it here.”
- “I have everything I could have wished for and more.”
- “Staff are very nice.”
- “Staff get to know you and your little ways.”
- “I can be private when I want to be and get up when I like.”
- “Everyone is friendly. We do have a laugh.”
- “There’s a lot going on. You’d never guess when you look at it from the street.”

“I was quite worried about leaving the house I’d lived in for so many years, but being here is such a relief. I don’t have to worry about anything.”

- “They do us proud. We’ve always got something to look forward to.”
- “I love it when the hairdresser comes. It makes me feel so nice. My nails are nice too. Look! The care staff do that for me and give me a lovely hand massage too. You really get looked after here.”

Relatives told us that they had confidence in Smallwood Court, saying:

- “My uncle is so happy here. It’s all we wanted.”
- “It is such a relief to know she’s in safe hands.”
- “We had worried that Dad wouldn’t take to it. He doesn’t like being forced into doing things and likes to go his own way, you know? The staff get that and, although it will never be the same as when he was fitter and at home, he does get to choose.”

“I am so glad that she is here. Now, when I spend time with her it is on the good stuff, without all the worry we had when she was at home. I feel like I’ve got the best of my mum back.”

Being listened to

Residents’ meetings are held every month. Meetings for relatives are held once a quarter. Concerns and queries can be raised between meetings, and residents and relatives are able to add items to the agenda.

Residents told us that their preferences and suggestions were listened to and acted on. Sometimes this relates to personal choices about daily routines, activities and personal shopping. Sometimes this relates to other aspects of life in the home, for instance menu choices or group activities and outings.

Person-centred care

We did not look at care plans but we did talk about person-centred care. We were told by staff that there is a focus on this, with mandatory training for staff. Each resident has a care plan and we heard that both residents and relatives are involved in creating and updating this. Residents and staff told us that care plans are reviewed monthly.

We noticed that residents’ rooms contained information about their lives and their interests, likes and dislikes, as well as family information. Every resident has a **Smallwood Court Gets to Know You** booklet. Every room has framed name plaque on the door. Most have a framed picture of the resident, except where residents have not wanted this. There are also specific instructions, for example, ‘Please knock before entering’.

End of life care is managed at Smallwood Court and the home involves other support and organisations as necessary. Hospital admissions are avoided where possible and community nurses visit as necessary. Four members of staff have a specific interest in this area. We were told that most needs can be met at the home.

Activities for residents

An activities coordinator plans and runs activity programmes with two staff supporting the activities on a daily basis. There are two planned activities each day or evening. Some activities are related to what is going on at the time, for example, at the time of our visit there were some sporting tournament related activities and some related to The Proms.

One of the ground floor rooms is a dedicated arts and crafts space with a large table, sink and crafting materials available. A number of daily newspapers are available to residents in a lounge. Two residents told us that they would like to be able to use a shared tablet

in the lounge so that they can look up things they are interested in and stay in touch with grandchildren in other countries. They told us they would need the support of others to be able to do this, before being confident enough to buy a tablet of their own.

Residents are encouraged to make use of the garden and get involved in gardening as well as feeding the birds. One resident told us that he had been able to bring his Stevenson Screen with him when he moved in and is supported to take daily weather readings, a hobby that he is now sharing with another resident.

On the third floor, residents were observed singing and dancing with staff in their communal lounge area.

We were told that new residents and their relatives are asked about interests and hobbies when they first arrive. Family and friends are also welcomed to activities.

Smallwood Court has a minibus and a driver and arranges trips out as well as responding to individual requests. Residents can suggest activities that they'd like to do or try. Some residents told us that the staff would put on things they requested and take them out on trips, but that they would like to see more organisations coming in from the community. They mentioned wanting a facilitated drama club, visiting pets and talks by 'interesting people'.

Meals and food

A daily menu is available at reception and in each dining area. We heard staff telling residents the food choices for the day and the day after so that they could choose what they would like before they sit down to eat. During lunch, we observed that:

- Residents are encouraged to eat in the dining rooms but can eat in their rooms if they prefer.
- People using the dining rooms were sitting together in groups and chatting.
- Residents were supported with eating where necessary with kindness and patience.
- Meals were served individually so that portions and personal preferences were catered for.
- Lots of staff were available to help with lunch.
- Staff interacted with residents.
- A spillage was quickly cleaned up by staff without fuss.

Residents and their visitors can also use the café style dining area on the ground floor. There are two chefs on site employed by the home. Outside of meal times there are snacks available throughout the communal areas, including fruits and biscuits. The food looked appetising and fresh.

Drinks were readily available throughout the day and being regularly topped up. There are tea/coffee stations in each dining area for use by residents, families and staff at any time. Water, juice and soft drinks are also available at any time from fridges in each dining area.

Physical environment

Smallwood Court is in a pleasant setting and is set back from the road. Inside the home, there is no external noise. It is well ventilated and corridors are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and walking aids. There are accessible toilets, ramps, push-button doors and lifts so that residents can move freely within the home.

The external doors are kept locked, with the exception of those opening to the enclosed garden. Residents told us that they particularly enjoy the garden, even if they mostly look out at it. There are mixed raised beds, including a vegetable bed that residents enjoy tending. Accessible pathways lead around the garden which has lawned areas and benches in shaded areas. Residents particularly enjoy watching the birds that come into the garden to use the bird feeders and bird bath.

Dining and lounge areas are clean and well furnished. Lounge furniture included chairs and sofas with small tables and was arranged in an informal way. One of the lounges is small and designated a quiet room with a number of books, where residents may sit quietly and read. Residents may also use this room if they want to spend quiet time with a member or minister of their faith community.

There is an equipped room that is used as a treatment room and a salon. It was clean and tidy and a hairdresser was cutting and styling residents' hair on one of the days when we visited. Residents told us that they also see a podiatrist in this room as well as the optician, who also does hearing tests. A GP practice visits and sometimes they also use this room.

The second floor in particular is not as dementia friendly as the rest of the home. It would benefit from different colour doors, and a colour-contrasting carpet. Communal toilets would be better with non-white toilet seats. We noticed that, although the date and time were readily available on each floor and in the communal rooms, not all the clocks were showing the correct time.

Residents' rooms were clean and well kept, with plenty of storage space. Each room has an ensuite. The rooms are well sound-proofed and residents have a number of ways to alert staff to their needs including pull cords and wearable buttons. Residents personalise their rooms with furniture, pictures, photos, plants and soft furnishings. Residents who prefer to spend time in their room have them kitted out with what they choose. For instance, one resident has a Bluetooth speaker to listen to audiobooks, which staff support them to download.

An unpleasant odour was noted in one area where a regular and thorough clean of the carpet had proved challenging.

All the corridors were kept free of obstacles such as walking aids or trolleys and equipment was stored appropriately. We did not look at medication administration, however we noted that medication/medical aid stores were securely locked.

Some of the signage was placed at quite a high level and residents would benefit from it being lowered to around five feet. Some residents would also benefit from signage being in plain font. Notices are clear but discreet and main noticeboards are kept in the reception and dining areas to give a homely feel to other areas. Noticeboards contained varied information about life inside and outside Smallwood Court. Staff photographs were displayed but without their names.

Staff

Staff told us that staffing levels for each area of Smallwood Court were flexible and decided based on need. More staff work on the third floor with people living with dementia, as most people here need two people to help with personal care. Staff are able to work in any part of the building but tend to work in one area so that residents have continuity of staffing. Smallwood Court does use agency staff at times, but they will always work with an established team member and agency staff tend to return.

The manager makes a point of being with staff and residents every day and two deputy managers are based on the floors each morning and evening. Staff told us they 'lead by example'.

During our visit we observed:

- Positive, kind and friendly interactions between staff and residents.
- Staff evidently knew individual residents well and catered to their needs.
- Staff were cheerful and used gentle humour appropriately.
- In every area of the home, staff were visible and engaging with residents rather than talking to each other.
- Uniforms were clean and presentable, and all staff wore their name badge.

Recruitment, induction and training

We asked about recruitment and were told that there are currently no challenges with recruitment. Staff turnover is low and when a vacancy arises, action is taken to quickly fill the post. Agency staff are used for less than 5% of total staff time to cover for unexpected absence.

All staff receive a full induction which includes a mixture of e-learning and face-to-face sessions, shadowing other staff across all areas of the home and close support and supervision over a period of weeks.

The home has a comprehensive training for all staff. Some core training is repeated and updated in line with best practice. Staff told us that:

- Personal development is encouraged and supported where possible. For example, two members of staff are interested in training to lead appropriate exercise classes for residents and Smallwood Court has arranged and paid for this.
- If training takes place outside of working hours, staff are paid for the time spent doing this.
- Some training is e-learning and staff can complete this flexibly.
- Most training is undertaken face-to-face so that staff can be fully sure they have understood and can put their training into practice. In-person training includes medication, first aid, fire and safeguarding.
- All staff are trained to be able to support residents, not only care staff but also admin, catering and laundry. This means that everybody can help at lunch, support residents to access the gardens and go out in the minibus.

About Evolving Communities

Evolving Communities is an independent community interest company (CIC). We specialise in listening to people and communities who use services, gathering insight to drive improvement. Evolving Communities has been delivering local Healthwatch services since their inception in 2013. One of the powers of a local Healthwatch is to Enter and View any health and care setting. We have been a trusted partner for Quality Scrutiny Groups, Care Quality Commission and Local Authority commissioners in this for over 12 years. In that time, we have built up a robust training and delivery methodology to make sure that we can make a difference to care services and those who use them.

We have brought our extensive knowledge and experience to create a meaningful and collaborative care home quality visit offer that will support care home providers to be confident in offering a high-quality service.

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