

Dementia friendly communities

Guidance for councils

Dementia is a condition that is increasingly common; it can have a profound impact on an individual and their family and friends. Traditionally, the focus for dementia care has been NHS treatments and care services delivered by local councils. Recently there has been a shift to a focus on how we can enable people who have been diagnosed with dementia to live as full a life as possible and encourage communities to work together to help people with dementia have the best chance to live well.

Councils have the power to shape services so that they are dementia friendly. Working in partnership with community organisations, across the whole of their areas of responsibility and embracing new ways of working are ways for councils to embrace and deliver dementia friendly communities.

This summary of the guidance is written for council officers and members and outlines what is meant by a dementia friendly community.

Full guidance on dementia friendly communities for councils is available on: www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7058797/Dementia+friendly+communities+guidance+for+councils/7acaa658-329e-4aa1-bdff-ef6a286dd373

What is a ‘dementia friendly community’

The Alzheimer’s Society defines a dementia friendly community as¹:

‘A city, town or village where people with dementia are understood, respected and supported, and confident they can contribute to community life. In a dementia friendly community people will be aware of and understand dementia, and people with dementia will feel included and involved, and have choice and control over their day-to-day lives’

People with dementia have described a dementia friendly community as one that enables them to find their way around and be safe, access local facilities and maintain social networks.

Dementia friendly communities are those in which people with dementia have the best possible opportunities to live well. The idea that it is possible to ‘live well’ with dementia is one which presents a challenge to the orthodox view of dementia. The idea that a diagnosis of dementia is life ending is increasingly being challenged as new visions for living well with dementia emerge.

The concept of dementia friendly communities represents a recognition that in order to make these aspirations to ‘live well’ a reality - a community-wide response is required. In 2013 the Alzheimer’s Society and Dementia Action Alliance launched its recognition process for dementia friendly communities, which outlined characteristics of a dementia friendly community.

A community may demonstrate how they are ‘working to become dementia friendly’ by:

- ensuring the right local structure is in place to maintain a sustainable dementia friendly community
- identifying a person to take responsibility for driving forward the work to support a community to become dementia friendly
- having a plan in place to raise awareness about dementia in key organisations and businesses within the community that support people with dementia
- developing a strong voice for people with dementia living in communities
- raising the profile of the work to increase reach and awareness to different groups in the community
- focusing plans on a number of key areas that have been identified locally
- having in place a plan or system to update the progress of your community.

Councils can play an important role in creating dementia friendly communities, as service providers, commissioners, planners, regulators, as leaders and influencers and as employers.

¹ Guidance for communities registering for the recognition process for dementia friendly communities. Alzheimer’s Society and DAA 2013

There are actions councils can take across five key domains; **voices, place, people, resources** and **networks**.

The voices of people with dementia

The voices of people with dementia and their carers should be at the start and the heart of the process of creating dementia friendly communities. Dementia friendly communities need to be responsive to what people want, but perhaps more importantly, people with dementia should have the right to have a sense of ownership, investment, responsibility and connectedness to their own communities.

What can councils do?

- check the accessibility of local consultation and engagement processes
- ensure that support is available, including 1-1 support to engage in mainstream processes
- consider a parallel engagement process for people who would find it difficult to engage in mainstream processes, even with support
- support the development of 1-1 support and peer group support, both of which are powerful platforms for engagement
- make sure that people with dementia and their carers are fully engaged and supported to engage in the local Dementia Action Alliance.

The place

There's a lot that can be done to make the physical environment, and the information encountered within it more accessible to everyone. Councils have significant influence over not just their own services and spaces, but those of organisations who they commission, regulate or work with at a strategic level.

What can councils do?

- audit their customer-facing services to check for accessibility
- ensure that planning departments consider the access needs of people with dementia
- engage people with dementia in reviewing the built environment, including green and natural spaces
- work with local partners in the creation of accessible 'high streets'
- work with strategic partners to ensure that communities feel safe
- consider the accessibility of transport, including clear signage and information as well as the provision of support to travel
- consider the role of housing, including the scope in making people's homes easier to use through adaptations and equipment
- ensure that information provided about services uses plain English and is clearly laid out.

The people

People make communities dementia friendly. People are usually willing to help, but stigma, fear and misunderstanding around dementia can mean that people are unsure of what to do for the best.

Awareness-raising and training have a crucial role to play in the creation of more dementia friendly communities. This is probably the most important feature of a dementia friendly community and the area where local authorities have the greatest potential to transform the lives of people with dementia.

What can councils do?

- encourage and support all staff and elected members to engage with the Dementia Friends programme and to become Dementia Friends. Support key staff and elected members to become dementia champions – so that they can train and support other members and officers to become Dementia Friends and to act as ambassadors and supporters of work to promote dementia friendly communities locally
- consider including Dementia Friends as part of basic induction for all customer facing staff
- support the rollout of Dementia Friends to partner organisations and the broader community by making premises available for session, or by running sessions in public spaces or as a part of larger events
- ensure that appropriate additional training or information on dementia is available for staff in customer facing roles who may need more than basic awareness
- make sure that awareness-raising is promoted and supported within Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities
- take a lead in developing employment policies that include the needs of people with dementia and their carers.

The resources

The provision of timely support enables people to maintain independence and avoid crisis admissions to healthcare. Services, resources and initiatives which have particular potential to support the capacity and resilience of people with dementia and their carers are access to timely diagnosis and appropriate post diagnosis support.

What can councils do?

- review how they are enabling people living with dementia and their families and carers to access holistic, integrated and effective post-diagnostic support.
- existing counselling and mainstream information services could be encouraged to consider their accessibility to people with dementia, and their awareness of issues affecting carers
- public health could maintain focus on public health campaigns using resources such

as Dementia Friends, as well as promoting key messages and actions to promote prevention and healthy living

- encourage and support the development of peer support groups for people with dementia – the DEEP project can offer further guidance
- encourage and support opportunities for mentoring and volunteering for people with dementia. Work with volunteer agencies to ensure that their services are accessible to and aware of the needs and potential of people with dementia as volunteers.
- consider how the capacity of council services can be stimulated to provide a range of support for people with dementia, for example: activities at the local leisure centre in which people with dementia can take part in – classes with carers, adapted games, supporting access to mainstream provision
- through appropriate training and awareness-raising ensure that frontline staff do not inappropriately refer people with dementia seeking support from mainstream services and facilities to specialist provision
- when commissioning services, recognise the role that mainstream activities and services play in the lives of people with dementia – ultimately, it is in mainstream provision that people with dementia will spend most of their time and derive most of their benefit.

The networks

Lots of other people and organisations are thinking about the need to become more dementia friendly, including many of your strategic partners. Working with and supporting them could be a valuable contribution to making the wider community more dementia friendly as well as getting support and learning to apply to your own services.

What can councils do?

- set up a local Dementia Action Alliance (DAA) if there is not one in existence or join one if there is. DAAs have an important role in creating a shared and jointly owned vision across all partners
- sign up for the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friendly Communities recognition process
- use strategic drivers such as the community safety plan, policing plan, health and well-being strategy and transport plan as well as strategies for older people and people with dementia as levers to reinforce the needs of people living with dementia
- support and encourage local businesses, community based and voluntary organisations to ensure that they are enabling people living with dementia to access their services and activities. This will include working with local faith groups, social clubs, sporting and leisure associations – to persuade them of the importance of making their services accessible to people living with dementia and actively promoting activities for them. This might involve minimum seed funding, to enable organisations to address the needs of members who have dementia or people with care for someone with dementia.

Further information

Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP)

<http://dementivoices.org.uk>

Dementia Action Alliance

<http://www.dementiaaction.org.uk>

Dementia Friends

www.dementiafriends.org.uk/Home/About

The Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friendly Communities recognition process

<http://alzheimers.org.uk/recognitionprocess>



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