



Dementia-Friendly
Communities

Making Buckinghamshire Dementia Friendly

*Briefing note for businesses
and organisations*



Making Buckinghamshire a Dementia-Friendly county

What is a Dementia-Friendly community?

Dementia-Friendly communities aim to:

- Empower and include individuals
- Reduce social isolation
- Challenge stigma
- Raise awareness
- Support carers

Why do we need to be dementia-friendly?

Dementia currently affects over 850,000 in the UK.

There are many forms of dementia, but they are all diseases of the brain which can cause:

- Problems with memory
- Problems with everyday tasks, like handling money
- Problems with communication
- Problems with perception

It is progressive in that it starts off with very mild symptoms and gets worse over time.

It affects everyone differently. No two people with dementia are the same.

Why do we need to know about dementia?

In Buckinghamshire more than 6,800 people have been diagnosed with dementia with many more experiencing problems with memory.

With an ageing population this number is expected to rise to over 9,700 within the next 10 years.

Increasingly, people with dementia are living for much longer in the community, and that will mean that increasingly, more and more of your customers, and potential customers will have dementia.

You probably already have some customers who have dementia.

You certainly have many potential customers who have dementia.

Making it easier for people with dementia to use your service, and supporting your staff to serve them more effectively has a number of very clear benefits:

- It will enable you to maintain your existing customers who might have, or be developing, dementia. If they do not find it easy to use your business, they are likely to seek out another.
- It will enable you to attract new customers. There will be an increase in the numbers of people with dementia living independently. They will use the businesses which are easiest to use.
- Your business may have a community charter, or a community benefit component to your quality assurance programme. Making it easier for people with dementia to use your business will be a very big 'plus'.
- It will help with compliance to the Equality Act 2010.

- Staff who are unsure how to best serve customers with dementia may be hesitant in helping, causing delays to themselves, the customer with dementia, and other customers.

How can I make things easier for people with dementia to use my business?

1. Ask people with dementia what it is like to use your business.

You may already know people with dementia – if so, that is a great place to start.

People with dementia will often be able to tell you very directly which aspects of your business they find easy to use, and which present barriers to them.

For more information – if you don't know any people with dementia, you can contact your local Alzheimer's Society, who might be in a position to arrange for people with dementia to visit and then let you know what they think.

2. Have a look around at your buildings and facilities – are they dementia-friendly?

There are often some very simple changes we can make which make the environment much easier for people with dementia.

The Dementia Action Alliance organisation has a useful [check list](#) for making simple changes to the physical environment.

3. Check whether the information you provide about your business is dementia-friendly

At the very least you should make sure you use plain English.

A rough guide for businesses wanting to make their information dementia-friendly is available on request from the Innovation in Dementia organisation:

www.innovationindementia.org

or email

ideas@innovationsindementia.org.uk

4. Raise your awareness of dementia

Dementia Friends is an initiative by the Alzheimer's Society delivering **free awareness sessions**, lasting about 45 minutes, in the local community. Contact www.dementiafriends.org.uk to find out more or to book a session.

Age UK is another source of useful information.

People with dementia tell us repeatedly that it is the attitude of those they encounter in their communities which has the biggest impact on their lives in their community.

Our work in Buckinghamshire has shown that those with good ‘people skills’ or within organisations with a strong focus on customer care may already have many of the attributes or skills they need to be able to support people with dementia as customers.

However, a basic understanding of the impact of dementia and how to support people can make a huge difference both to the experience of the customer, and to that of the staff involved.

People living with dementia will encounter a range of people on a day-to-day basis as they go about their business.

They may experience a range of problems associated with dementia that have the potential to impact on their ability to interact with those they encounter. Similarly those they encounter may be unsure how and whether to help people who appear to be experiencing difficulties.

People with dementia all differ in the way they experience their dementia, but generally speaking in public situations people with dementia may have a range of difficulties, including:

- Have problems remembering what they are doing
- Have difficulties in communicating clearly
- Have problems handling money

- Have problems navigating in complex or confusing environments

How staff respond to people who may be experiencing these kind of problems makes the biggest difference.

How to help customers with dementia and memory problems

I. What are people with dementia like?

Everyone experiences dementia in different ways, and no two people are the same.

What is a problem for one person, may not be for another, and visa-versa.

The image of a person with dementia you might have in your head is perhaps that of someone who is:

- Very confused
- Needs a lot of help
- Lives in a care home
- Can’t communicate
- Cannot control themselves

If you have this image in your head, it would not be surprising, as that is the way people with dementia are often portrayed in the media.

Most people with dementia you will encounter will not resemble this stereotype at all.

They are more likely to have much less pronounced difficulties, living independently, getting out and about,

using shops and cafes, doing the same kind of things we all do.

BUT they may just need a little more help to carry on doing these things as time goes by.

2. How can I spot a person with dementia?

You can't.

Most people with dementia are over 65, but some are younger.

Some people with dementia will tell you if they are having problems, and how you can help.

Some people carry a card which explains the problems they have and how you might help.

You might also notice customers doing, or saying things which suggest that they are having problems that might be caused by dementia.

These include:

- Looking, or saying that they are a bit lost or confused.
- They might appear to be searching for something they can't find
- They might be looking like they don't know what to do next
- They might appear to have problems handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card.
- They might be finding self-service facilities hard to understand

- Their speech might be hard to understand
- They might appear to have problems understanding what you are saying
- They might forget to pay for things they have picked up

Of course, there are all sorts of reasons why people might be having these problems that are nothing to do with dementia or memory problems.

Generally speaking the younger the person appears to be, the less likely it is to be dementia-related. But remember, younger people can have dementia too.

3. What can I do to help?

If you have good 'people skills' and work for a business with a good culture of customer care, you already have much of what you need to provide great service to people with dementia.

Kindness, common sense, avoiding stress, using good communication skills and a smile go a very long way.

Let's look at what we do to help if you see people having these kinds of problems:

What can I do if people are:

- Looking or saying that they are a bit lost or confused?
- Appearing to be searching for something they can't find
- Looking like they don't know what to do next

DO: approach them in a friendly open manner, and ask “can I help?”

It really is that simple, and for many people with dementia, this will be all they need, and will be able to explain how you can help.

DON'T: call to them from a distance

Many people with dementia have also got hearing problems, or might have difficulty locating where the voice is coming from. It is also much less friendly than approaching someone directly.

What can I do if people are:

- Appearing to have problems handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card.
- Appearing to find self-service facilities hard to understand.

Again, simply asking if you can help can go a long way.

Also, **DO:**

Tell them to take their time, there's no hurry

- Offer to pick out the right money if someone appears to be struggling to work out the coins or notes in their hand.
- Offer to run the items through self-service, or show them how to do it.
- Ask if they would like to sign for their purchase if they can't remember their PIN

- Offer to keep their shopping to one side so that they can come back and collect if when they have remembered their PIN

DON'T:

- Attempt to hurry them
- Let any impatience show, especially in the form of raised eyebrows, 'tutting', or exchanging knowing looks with other customers or staff

What can I do if people are hard to understand?

Some people with dementia develop problems with their speech, and these can be made worse if they feel stressed or hurried.

DO:

- Encourage them to take their time
- Listen very carefully and make sure that you are communicating through your body language that you are listening and focused on them
- Be conscious of their body language
- If you still don't understand – then take a best guess and say something along the lines of “I'm finding it hard to understand you, are you saying ...?”
- If this doesn't work, then ask them to point at what they want
- Some people are still able to write – so ask them if they can write it down

What can I do if someone appears to have problems understanding what I am saying?

Some people with dementia can develop problems understanding what is said to them, especially if they feel stressed or hurried, or if there is a lot of background noise and distractions.

DO:

- Take your time, speak clearly and not too quickly
- Try to make only one point at a time
- Say things more simply if you need to
- Make sure you are at the same level as the person, and use good eye contact
- Try saying things another way
- Use sign language and gestures to reinforce what you are saying, that can be a big help.

What can I do if someone appears to have forgotten to pay for something?

This is difficult. While someone may have forgotten to pay, they might equally be engaged in theft, and your safety is the most important thing.

If you know the person, and you know that they have dementia, then you can simply ask if you can help, and if they

would like to pay. This will often be all you need to do.

People with dementia will sometimes think that they do not need to pay, or may feel that they shouldn't.

In these cases, it is up to the discretion of the manager. Some businesses, if they know the person and their carer, have simply totted up the value of the goods, and asked the carer to arrange for payment.

If you do not know the person, then your businesses usual policy on theft should apply.

What if none of this works and I need help?

One approach is to ask the person if they would like to take a rest or to sit down somewhere quiet, so long as you have that facility available. Quite often, after a break, people feel much better and are able to function more effectively.

Ask the person if there is anyone you can contact who might be able to help. If so, then call them.

If none of this works, and the person appears to need help, then you should call for your manager to help.

If you are the manager, or are working alone, then depending upon the nature of your business and location you could call:

- The disability support centre if you are in a large retail complex

- Your community police officer, you should have their number on hand
- Social services outreach
- If the person appears to be at risk, then the emergency services as a last resort

If you would like to find out more about Dementia Friendly Communities, or information about dementia please contact:

Gemma Workman at Buckinghamshire County Council

01296 387821

dfcommunities@buckscc.gov.uk

Alzheimer's Society in Buckinghamshire

01296 331722

**Memory Advice Service
Age UK Buckinghamshire**

01296 438415