

# MAKING A START

## DEMENTIA – SKILLING THE GENERAL NEEDS HOUSING WORKFORCE

# TEN KEY POINTS

This report and Resource Pack, written on behalf of the Dementia and Housing Working Group, and funded by five housing associations, considers: why general needs housing providers need to equip their workforce to work effectively with people who have dementia; what they would be advised to do; and how they might go about doing it.

- 1** The number of people developing dementia in the UK is increasing significantly as the population ages. Most of these live in mainstream housing. Responding to the dementia challenge, therefore, will increasingly become part of a mainstream challenge to housing management and community services.
- 2** To create a society and communities that are dementia-friendly – a key national policy – all organisations have a responsibility within the scope of their own remit to maximise the wellbeing of people living with dementia.
- 3** Both through their staff and their role in creating and managing neighbourhoods and the built environment, general needs housing providers are well placed to act as early responders and active partners for improving our society's response to dementia. To do this, their workforce requires knowledge, understanding and skills.
- 4** In addition to improving the wellbeing of customers (tenants, leaseholders and others receiving services), there is a good business case for being dementia friendly: the potential for more effective and efficient asset management and housing services, which enhance reputation and competitive edge, and reduce the risk of litigation and safeguarding issues.
- 5** A practical first step, applicable to the widest range of housing providers, is to raise awareness of dementia amongst the workforce, board, and possibly also customers, and provide relevant training.
- 6** The specific content and depth of awareness-raising or training sessions needed will depend on the staff member's particular role, and their level of contact with customers at significant risk of developing dementia. Three categories of staff have been identified based on this criterion: no or minimal contact; some contact; and significant contact.

**7** It is preferable for the content of sessions to be tailored to both the housing context and specific organisation: for example, its ethos, service offers, customer base and core training provisions. It is also beneficial for people with dementia and their carers to contribute to the design and delivery of training. The training framework outlined in the Resource Pack as part of this project provides a starting point.

**8** General needs providers can adopt different approaches to build up the necessary knowledge and skills of their staff, ranging from sending staff to off-the-shelf awareness-raising at one end of the spectrum, to employing a specialist trainer at the other, and a range of options in-between. The accompanying Resource Pack provides details of some external sources of dementia awareness-raising and training to assist in the process.

**9** Proportionate training is necessary but not sufficient to ensure a skilled workforce. Staff need reinforcement and reminders as well as support in line with their particular roles. Relevant qualifications would help to embed the learning.

**10** To make an effective contribution, skilled staff need to work within a dementia-friendly organisation: one which provides leadership and whose ethos, policies, procedures, practices, services and buildings are dementia-friendly rather than disabling. Starting with knowledge of their customer profile and the needs of the workforce for dementia awareness-raising and training, organisations could develop dementia strategies which are proportionate, incremental and tailored.

The Executive Summary, full report and Resource Pack are available at:  
[www.housinglin.org.uk/makingastart\\_housingworkforceanddementia](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/makingastart_housingworkforceanddementia)

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On behalf of the Dementia and Housing Working Group

## **ABOUT THE DEMENTIA AND HOUSING WORKING GROUP**

The Dementia and Housing Working Group was set up by the National Housing Federation and the Department for Communities and Local Government to:

- Improve the integration of housing in health and social care policy on the issue of dementia
- Raise the profile of housing with central and local government and among key dementia stakeholders, highlighting good practice in the housing, care and support sector in meeting the needs of people living with dementia
- Provide a platform to promote innovation and research from other organisations on housing and dementia.

The Working group has a number of subgroups, one of which has focused on workforce skills. It was members of this sub-group who initiated this piece of work.