



## Breaking down the enigma of dementia: Extra Care at Bletchley Park

This case study focuses on Flowers House, a scheme comprising 34 flats, providing assisted living for people with dementia in Bletchley, near Milton Keynes. This is a unique partnership project between a housing provider and a local authority to deliver much needed accommodation and support for people living with the condition. It was a scheme which would not have come to fruition had it not been for the late intervention of the housing developer, Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG), and one which today offers a stimulating environment, based around independent living for its residents. The key theme along the journey has been partnership.



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## Background

As covered in other Housing LIN resources, across the United Kingdom the percentage of older people is increasing. In Milton Keynes this means that over the next 30 years those aged 60 and over will increase by 150% and the numbers of people aged over 85 is forecast to grow from 2,330 to around 9,000 - a rise of 286%. It is therefore expected that within the next 5 years those in the age group 65-74 will increase by 98%, but, more significant for social care in this time period, those aged 75+ will increase by 40%. Also, with people living longer there will be an increase in the number of people with dementia, and again it is predicted that the number of people experiencing this condition will double in the next 20 years. This could mean that the numbers of older people who need support may increase from 5,000 to approximately 7,500 within 5 years and from 5,000 to approximately 14,000 within 20 years.

In response to the predicted increase in the number of people who will be living with dementia, the government's 2009 National Dementia Strategy and the Prime Minister's subsequent Challenge emphasise the importance of developing a range of services to support early diagnosis and meet the needs of people through all stages in their journey with dementia. Services for older people in Milton Keynes are being actively improved but forward planning is needed to meet the housing needs of a rapidly increasing ageing population with more complex needs. These needs cannot be met by a single response. Current services need reshaping and refocusing in order to develop a range of options that support independence and offer real choice. The Housing LIN's Strategic Housing for Older People online modelling tool (SHOP@) forecasts a shortfall of 3,833 units of specialist accommodation by 2030 for Milton Keynes (view at: [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare/ExtraCareStrategy/SHOP/SHOPAT/](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare/ExtraCareStrategy/SHOP/SHOPAT/)).

Opened in November 2012, Flowers House is an attractively designed assisted living supported housing scheme in Bletchley, made up of 34 flats for people living with dementia. When the Flowers House scheme was proposed, some people were living in inadequate accommodation in a residential home which was earmarked for closure. Milton Keynes Council (MKC) originally planned to work with another provider and grant funding of £2.2 million from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was available but needed to be allocated by March 2011. When that deal fell through it was feared the grant would be lost as time was running out. The Council approached Aragon, and its parent company Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG), to see if they could rescue what would otherwise have been a doomed project. Against the odds, with only a few weeks to sign all the agreements Aragon rescued the project and with Bellcross, (the contractors) work was underway. Had Aragon not been able to respond so quickly, the grant would have been lost and with it the opportunity to progress this unique provision of much needed accommodation. The success of both the partnership and the scheme has showcased to other local authorities how it may be possible to expand provision of similar accommodation within similar partnership arrangements.

## The commissioning process

### *Exploring the options*

Previously, in Milton Keynes, people with dementia were supported at home by domiciliary care services or the specialist mental health teams until their needs could no longer be met, and they would typically enter nursing or residential care. This could mean carers and their loved ones being separated. At that time, provision of care was either delivered through a block contract with Excel care who provided 104 specialist dementia care beds, or by the council run care home St Giles, which provided 34 beds. Whilst the Excel care homes had

been recently built to modern specifications, St Giles was built in the 1970s and no longer met the environmental requirements that people expected. It would have needed significant investment to meet expected standards. It was therefore proposed that alternative options to St Giles be explored which would offer tenancies in extra care housing for the majority of residents, and for others, support in the other residential or nursing units. This would be determined by individual assessments of need.

A consultation process was undertaken with members of the public, service users and staff on the following two options:

1. A new build development that would provide approximately 30 purpose build flats with assistive technology as standard and would be staffed with council employees with expertise in dementia care. It would be developed in partnership with a range of potential providers including registered social landlords, and subject to clarification on grant allocation from the HCA.
2. Using an existing sheltered scheme and redeveloping it into an extra care housing scheme. This would provide approximately 30 flats with assistive technology added and would be staffed with council employees with expertise in dementia care. However, this would inevitably mean some sheltered scheme tenants being supported to take up tenancies elsewhere.

### ***Outcomes from the consultation***

Following extensive consultation the preferred option was to develop a brand new scheme that would be able to accommodate a range of care and support needs and provide a flexible model of accommodation.

Flowers House was developed with a shared vision for the service throughout the 18 months between GUHG stepping in and the residents moving into their apartments. It was the first partnership of its kind for the local authority and because of the tight deadline to secure the grant, close working was required throughout to ensure its effectiveness.

Once the decision was taken, there was a clear focus for the future and a project group was immediately set up involving key stakeholders. As some residents were unable to represent themselves, family members were invited to take part in these meetings throughout the development of the scheme. Also attending were the GUHG development team, Aragon HA, Adult Services staff from Milton Keynes Council and representatives from the care home which was being closed down and who were moving with residents to the new scheme.

Every eight weeks development meetings were held to ensure good progress was maintained and that communication at all levels continued. The meetings discussed and agreed build progress, furnishings, and the transition from registered care to supported living. This meant families had an opportunity to be involved in the interior design of the building and to give feedback on fixtures and fittings for apartments and the communal areas. This led to some important features including memory shelves outside each 'front door' upon which residents could place personal items to help them orientate themselves. Each floor has been painted a different colour, again to help with orientation, and everyone's front door is a different colour for the same reason. Kitchen and bathroom fittings, along with the modern interior design were all chosen in consultation with the residents' families and trained staff.

Staff attended Bletchley Council meetings to keep all interested parties up to date with developments.

## ***Scheme marketing and PR***

At all stages it was important that information was disseminated to all stakeholders in a timely and accurate way. This resulted in regular stakeholder updates in the form of newsletters which helped inform and manage expectations, especially among the residents and families of those who were moving from St Giles residential care home.

It was similarly important that the local community were appraised of the scheme's developments in order to allay potential fears about how it may impact on them. There was also considerable attention to the official opening, as Alzheimer's Society Ambassador and actor Kevin Whately (best known as Lewis from the TV shows, "Morse" and "Lewis"), agreed to perform the formal opening. This attracted interest from local and national press, including regional television which focussed on the growing need for similar schemes.

## **About the scheme**

The scheme has been designed to provide a safe, secure environment, giving families peace of mind, yet in an unobtrusive way. Flowers House offers 34 individual flats (3 of which have two bedrooms) aimed specifically at tenants living with dementia. The focus at Flowers House is on independent living for residents with a range of needs arising from their dementia. MKC provides domiciliary support 24 hours a day. GUHG subsidiary Aragon owns and manages the accommodation and Aragon's Home Support Officers provide visiting support, checking on tenants' wellbeing and advising on matters ranging from tenancy issues to financial income management, as well as maintaining the fabric of the building.

When the scheme opened, some residents moved there from the out-dated residential care home and others from the community.

## ***Location***

Flowers House is set on the edge of the world famous, 'code-breaking' Bletchley Park amid an attractive new development of town houses and in its own landscaped grounds. The planning process was complex because of the tenant group and the proximity to Bletchley Park Museum. Architects, CMYK, worked closely with MKC Planning Department and secured approval in March 2011.



## ***Physical design***

The scheme is designed to complement the existing historic buildings at Bletchley Park but utilises current styles and construction techniques to create a fresh modern feel, sympathetic to its surroundings. The accommodation is modern and airy, more in the style of a hotel with several communal areas. It had to be designed in an H shape because of the footprint of the land.

Individual apartments all have a fitted kitchen and wet room. The two-bedroom properties have enabled couples who had previously been forced to live apart to be together once more.



Due to the client group, careful consideration was given to sustainable technologies. In order to ensure that extra learning was not required or multiple systems installed, stakeholders agreed to use a 'fabric first' approach to ensure the building was as sustainable as possible, but not overly complicated. Therefore, the scheme is highly insulated, using zoned under-floor heating and a mechanical heat

recovery system. All these technologies mean minimal interaction is required by residents, yet the building is sustainable and achieves the Code for Sustainable Homes level 3.

### ***Use of assistive technology***

A comprehensive alarm system is managed on site at Flowers House, consisting of: a personal trigger in the form of a pendant (this is not appropriate for all tenants); red pull cords located in bathrooms; and a speech box located in the hallway of each flat.

In addition, a wide range of further assistive technologies, including wireless sensors can be installed in each flat, depending on the individual needs of the resident. Each resident has an individually assessed, tailored package of the latest discreet assistive technology such as alarms and sensors, to enable them to live independently, yet safely, providing families with much needed peace of mind.

### ***Staffing***

The emphasis at Flowers House has been on joint working at all levels, from the care team to senior management at both MKC and at Aragon.

When the options for the scheme were being explored, families did not want to lose the benefit of the care provided at St Giles. For this reason, it was proposed that the much valued care delivered by council staff at St Giles would be transferred to support the new extra care housing provision. This was subject to a change management process. It involved developing a staff consultation paper clearly outlining those staff affected, plans for redeployment and prior consideration for vacant posts, and a transparent process for implementation. Before the scheme opened, staff training focused on new technology, the tenancy arrangements and welfare benefits support. Part of this training included a focus on the different ethos of delivering independent domiciliary care rather than residential care. All care staff are qualified to at least NVQ2 level, having completed not only their mandatory training, but also specialised dementia training which is provided in-house.

Flowers House provides 24-hour support from a care team based at the scheme, and Aragon Housing Association provides a visiting Housing Support Officer to give residents support with their tenancies and welfare benefits, working in partnership with families. The scheme has a manager employed by Milton Keynes Council. The on-site care team comprises a registered manager, four team leaders and 26 care workers over 24 hours. Between the hours of 8am and 10pm there are six care staff plus management and support staff on duty, and overnight there are four staff on duty.

Care and support is discreet and unobtrusive, and delivered through support plans which are tailored to individual needs. They are reviewed regularly. Throughout all these reviews there is close liaison with families and wider stakeholders. The service aims to be truly person and relationship centred.

### ***Eligibility criteria and allocation process***

To be considered for a tenancy at Flowers House, the applicant needs to be assessed as needing care or support by Milton Keynes Council and have a diagnosis of dementia. Priority is given to residents of Milton Keynes.

In addition, applicants:

- will be mainly older people living with cognitive dysfunction arising from diagnosed dementia, with short term memory loss, some disorientation, and/or communication difficulties, but to a degree which is assessed as being manageable at the point of entry, allowing them to become settled in their new environment.
- will be people at all stages of dementia.
- must be able to appreciate in general terms, their rights and responsibilities as a housing tenant and as a recipient of care and support services.
- will have some knowledge and awareness of their surroundings.
- will be able to partake of supportive relationships within the scheme and function within a daily routine.
- should need the security and peace of mind offered by the scheme, but also appreciate having the privacy of their own flat.
- should be able to make choices (with appropriate degrees of support) about the care and support they receive.
- should not have a level of physical or mental frailty that is likely to cause serious disruption or risk to self or other occupants.
- should be considered as an alternative choice to residential care.

The eligibility criteria are applied by the council's Older People's Housing and Support Allocations Panel. The overall objective of the panel is to ensure that the Council's resources are appropriately allocated to benefit older people who are vulnerable and in need of support to continue living independently. Applicants are referred to the care team and Aragon's retirement housing team leader who review the person's needs. Once completed, a decision is made in partnership on the most suitable applicant for the vacancy.

### ***Assessments, support planning and support delivery***

The delivery of support and care at Flowers House is assessed by the Community Dementia Team at Milton Keynes Council. Following presentation to the panel, the assessment is then put into a care plan by the on-site team with very approximate times to guide the care process and ensure needs are met. Care is charged for as with any other domiciliary care service but there is also a background support charge which, as well as allowing some flexibility in the care, allows for all of the other unplanned aspects of caring for a person with dementia.

## ***Policies and procedures***

Policies and procedures applied to the care team are those policies set by Milton Keynes Council. The service was recently inspected by CQC and was found to be fully compliant, with all policies adhered to. This model of care does present an element of risk. For some families the risk of independent living initially posed a real worry, and each family had a meeting to discuss what they were worried about and how this would be overcome. The risks are so individual for each tenant that very broad brush questions such as “how do you stop people burning themselves in the kitchen” have to be answered at an individual level; for some the answer may be assistive technology whereas for someone else it may be to use the meal service and less cooking.

## ***Activities***

There is a dedicated activities co-ordinator at Flowers House employed by Milton Keynes Council who provides a varied daily menu of activities at the scheme such as art and crafts, gardening, baking, reminiscing, word games, fish and chip suppers, and numerous one-to-one sessions. Activities for those with dementia need to be more ad hoc than the planned programmes that are evident in other sheltered schemes. The activity organiser has the ability to read the mood of the group and tailor the activity according to the group or individual’s mood. In addition, a number of tenants go out of the scheme to a day centre of their choice.

## ***Other on-site services***

A range of visiting services are on offer including chiropody and hairdressing which can be arranged, and families become involved. As part of the initial care assessment tenants can request help with shopping and cleaning. Aragon also provides a handyman service. The team visits Flowers House one day per fortnight and supports tenants by doing odd jobs in their flats and carrying out duties around the scheme.

## ***Involvement of residents and their families***

Family involvement has been key throughout the development process and remains so through all the scheme’s operations. This ensures tenants and their families have a voice and can exercise choice. Families are encouraged to be part of the support group, where they can discuss and help towards their loved one’s choices.



## Conclusion

There is no doubt that Flowers House has captured the attention of those who recognise the urgency of increasing the provision of specialist residential support for people with dementia. The scheme, and its unique partnership arrangement, has set the standard for what is required to provide for future need. One in three people over the age of 65 will have some kind of dementia in their life so the more we can do to provide excellent care for a growing ageing population, the better. We all recognise this scheme is but a drop in the ocean, locally, not to mention nationally, but it proves that with excellent and innovative partnership working, there are opportunities to promote new ways of providing housing and associated services for those who need it.

Kevin Whately, whose mother died of dementia in 2009, said at the scheme opening:

*“When you reach that awful point and realise you can no longer care for a loved one yourselves and you look around at what is available, your hearts sinks. My heart has soared seeing what is offered here. Milton Keynes and Aragon have really set the standard of what’s needed at Flowers House.”*

[www.grandunionhousing.co.uk/news/tv-star-opens-dementia-scheme/](http://www.grandunionhousing.co.uk/news/tv-star-opens-dementia-scheme/)

It is also interesting to note that tenants who moved from St Giles have seen an improvement in their communication, mobility and overall life style. With the support of the 24-hour care team, tenants have the opportunity to lead a more independent life than in residential care. Some comments on the many positive outcomes have come from residents and their families. One family said that before the scheme opened they didn’t know where to turn for help or how they were going to manage the care and support of their mother.

*“Since this place opened it has been a huge weight off my shoulders. I know she is fine here and being well looked after. If I want to visit and have tea in her flat we can do just that, or we can come out into the lounge and socialise with other people. The choice is hers.*

*”The care is all due to the enthusiasm and dedication from the team and management; the patience of the staff has always amazed me.”*

There have been a great number of lessons learned, many of them around the coming together of two different cultures and a move from registered care for some residents and staff to a supported living environment. There have been occasional differing expectations of what the service should and could offer, and managing those expectations at every level from care staff to management has been a challenge, but one which has been worked through with great success. It has been a learning process, with all partners not afraid to be flexible and innovative; and when something has not worked, to try it in a different way.

And finally, the proof is that with the right level of support and tailored intervention, there is a supported living solution which hugely benefits individuals...breaking the enigma of dementia.



## Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

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## About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions, including dementia.

The Housing LIN is a member of the Dementia Action Alliance. For further information on this and about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources at 'In Focus: Innovations in Housing and Dementia', and opportunities for shared learning and service improvement, including site visits and network meetings in your region, visit:

[www.housinglin.org.uk/HousingandDementia](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/HousingandDementia)

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